WE OTHERS

STORIES OF

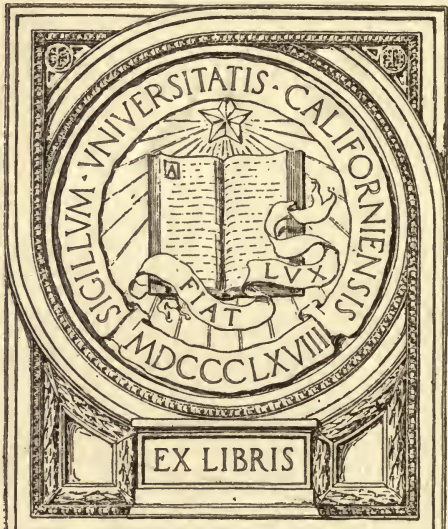
THE LOVE AND PITY

[illegible] OF

HENRI BARBUSSE

By Fitzwater Wray

ALVMNVS BOOK FVND



816
B241
ME

WE OTHERS

WE OTHERS

STORIES *of* FATE, LOVE *and* PITY

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

HENRI BARBUSSE

AUTHOR OF "UNDER FIRE," ETC.

BY

FITZWATER WRAY

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

COPYRIGHT, 1918,
BY E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

All Rights Reserved

English Alcuin

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

BOOK ONE: FATE

	PAGE
The Bad Little Moon	3
Force	9
Fate?	15
Immobility	21
Scarlet Thread	27
The Watchman	33
Blind Justice	39
The Wag	45
The Green Spectre	50
The Others	55

BOOK TWO: THE MADNESS OF LOVING

The Funeral March	63
The Way They Went	69
A Tale of Four	74
The Fairy Tale	80
Resurrection	86
The Dream	92
The Stricken	97

287684

PAGE

The First Love 103
The Libation 108
A Dream Too Good 113
A True Judge 120
The Three Madwomen 126
The Sensitive Plant 132
The Apparition 137
The Last Steps 143
The Presence 149
The Innocent 154
Affection 160

BOOK THREE: PITY

The Evil Eye 169
The Stone Man 176
The Eleventh 182
The Bad Custodian 188
The Cross of Honour 195
Saar 201
The Great Deeds of Lanturlu 208
The Miracle 214
The Other World 220
The Brother 226
The Mort 232
Revenge 238

PAGE

THE NAME 244

THE ONE GROWN OLD 250

THE MOTHER 256

THE GREAT MEMORY 262

THE MISTAKE 269

BOOK I

FATE

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE NAUGHTY BAD LITTLE MOON

THEY emerged from the ground—one, two, three, up to six—under the downfall of rain and night. One would say rather that they were emerging from out of water, for the continuous downpour of a month had drowned the scrub and given a sea-like look to the plain surrounding Adrianople and Devanjaros.

In the yellow spray of twilight each of them showed like a tall mass of sheepskins, whence spurted the barrel of a rifle. All six were crowned with green-topped caps of astrakhan.

They were a patrol of Macedonians, incorporated with the Bulgarian army and passing through the outposts.

Faltering and rocking in the ashen whirlwinds, they waved their long arms like the sails of a windmill, made the sign of the cross, and pointed their black faces to right, to left; and the big troubled eyes they opened wide were rat-like.

At fifty paces a branch that pricked up from the glistening ground began to flutter, and the Macedonians steered for the hole whence the signal came.

It was the abandoned trench. Sergeant Naritch and his five men had gone to earth there and had given the signal.

These six Bulgarians were fond of the six Macedonians. Diplovitch and Kaloub were companions of

long date. The old brigand Alexis had formerly taught Naritch law. Potrof and Reff were such near cousins that they had laughed till they cried when they discovered it at their first meeting. As for Suleiman and Nazif, they had to avenge the murder of her whom they both loved, so they were more than brothers.

Since the beginning of the siege these twelve men had gathered together, at that grey hour when rifles become blind and are obliged to sleep.

They used to meet in the old trench, now worthless. There they sat and rested, face to face, their feet in the same mud. Fraternally they exchanged a few words, with a mien at once ferocious and tranquil. They said, "It will be a long war," and "May God smash the Turk!"

Then, saying no more, the twelve men would fall to thinking, and their hearts were fuller, their thoughts more solemn, for thus touching each other. At last they would separate and the two squads return to camp by their two ways.

This evening the comrades in arms were sad when they assembled. The ceaseless rain, the unyielding cold, and a sort of fatigue, huge and new, oppressed them curiously.

"The war will never end!" announced Kaloub, and his cheeks, black as gunpowder, twitched with grimaces.

"Never!" replied Nazif, yawning like a dejected wolf.

They all lowered their heads and spat. And as it happens when the malady of melancholy overmasters

a company, they thought of mysterious things, to themselves at first, then aloud.

"The moon's got the shape of the enemy's crescent," said Kaloub in a changed voice, like some one who begins to sing.

"A bad sign," declared Alexis the venerable bandit, who had experience in matters of life and death; "it is the bad little moon."

He related the legend of the bad little moon, who kills by devious means all those on whom she looks down.

They raised their heads and squinted towards the slender crescent, now veiled in mourning.

"One should not tempt the moon!" muttered Potrof, who was a new-wed man, though turning grey. "Bad luck to us!"

"I'm sleepy," said Reff, plaintively, like a child.

"Let's be going!" growled Alexis. He fixed his bayonet in his untanned leggings, where the Macedonians carry their wooden table-tools as well, for they wear no waist-belt.

One by one the Macedonians went away. The Bulgarians watched them, and regretted their going. Then, instead of setting off in their turn, they remained in the ditch, prey to a great but random menace, worried by the gaze of the enemy moon, inebriate with fatigue and superstition.

Each mused by himself. Sergeant Naritch saw his little home and his wife, whose heavy dress showed as many colours as a flowerbed. Dreaming, he saw the sharp turn in the path, where a beloved little laugh announced the coming of a golden head. He caught the

scent of the hedge, and recognised the stunted willows that stand in rows along the brook like dolls.

Suddenly he cocked his chin and rubbed his eyes. He could see nothing more than the drenched darkness, and right at the bottom of it the pointed scimitar of the moon, hanging, gleaming.

He shook himself. What were they thinking of? It was late. Their little father the colonel would burst from his tent on their tracks, with the scarlet lining of his grey cloak dancing like flames, and then beware!

"Come, en route!"

They set themselves in motion, weeping from their yawns. With contracted faces they hoisted themselves out of the long ditch.

They marched and marched, opening their eyes immoderately wide, and receiving a rough blast of rain on their faces every time they risked a look up at the moon.

How now? Still no sentry. They stopped. They had gone astray. It was the fault of the moon and its half-light, its false, misleading light.

They shivered and set off again, lifting their feet high out of the bog. Quite accurately they avoided the shell-holes—little lakes that would drown a team of horses. They are reddish by day. At the end of half an hour, no fires, nothing.

They tried to better their bearings in the huge plain of mud, and again they filed forward with hanging heads.

Suddenly a rifle-shot——

The sergeant swore. He turned all ways, like a wind-vane.

"We're in the Turkish lines!"

The remark would have seemed ridiculous, so recently had they left the old trench, if it had not been for the moon's hatred through the whole business. They shook their heads, and Kaloub growled, "We should have gone back to camp along with the others; the Macedonians smell the right way with their noses."

They stood still, their faces intently, furiously forward.

"Ah, there are enemies watching us," gasped Diplovitch.

The uncertain light of the moon, slightly cleared by a squall, showed the shapeless outlines of soldiers, grouped in the scrub, quite near, within hail.

"Curses!" barked another Bulgarian.

So sure were they of the trap into which the moon was leading them that they could hardly help yelling in the terrible relief of having at last discovered the Danger.

Very quietly Naritch gave the order to fire. As if they had overheard, it was the enemy party that fired first.

Potrof, the man who had just been married, trembled, held his belly, and fell, shaking his head in vigorous protest.

The rifle-shots crackled and multiplied on both sides. Quickly men fell. The last who stood leaned forward, leaned farther, and lay full length. And it seemed to him in an agonised dream that some one yonder, among them who had killed him, groaned his name. The death-rattle arose on both sides, then weakened, and blended gently, like music.

All was quiet and still when a squad came up, dangling lanterns.

Twelve corpses. There, the six Macedonians; there, the six Bulgarians. Preyed upon by unnatural fear, confused by a fantastic legend, neither party had been able to regain the camp. The men of the two patrols had but half seen each other, like shadows. And they had killed each other at random, blindly, gropingly, without recognition, without knowing that they liked each other, without understanding that they were brothers—as always happens in war.

FORCE

"—NINE, ten!" droned the referee through the scrupulous silence.

They carried Phil M'Cue away motionless. Then a huge uproar lifted the roof of the basement room and its smell of a den of wild beasts, for here—about fifty years ago now—the sensational prize-fight had just ended between Phil M'Cue, champion of Australia, and Otis Yerre, champion of the Pacific Coast, and idol of San Francisco.

So the gentlemen amateurs of the 'Frisco ring gave themselves up whole-heartedly to cheering their big Yerre, who had just put M'Cue to bed so thoroughly, after having wiped out so many other heavy weights of equal or less celebrity, at the Mechanics' Hall, or Woodward's Pavilion.

All the same, and on both sides, there were some experts of the noble art who thought that big Yerre had hit rather hard at the end. M'Cue was a good sort, and a fighter. Brave and prodigally generous, he did not deserve such severe punishment. By the sixth round he was no longer a boxer. He seemed rather a man decapitated, who had had his head put on again and been set up on his feet. With drooping arms he oscillated to right and left, as a baboon does. Then, instead of breathing on him, big Yerre drew back a pace, waited and took aim; and his left had hooked the

queer figure's carotid artery with a force that nocturnal burglars might yearn to have for the persuasion of locked doors.

Naturally, M'Cue collapsed on the ground with a noise of dislocation; and no less naturally he died forty-eight hours later, while still unconscious, and vomiting blood. Thus may a champion act towards those who are rightly called "boiled fish", but not towards honourable adversaries.

Big Yerre continued his triumphant career. A star in the West at twenty-five years of age, he was a national celebrity at twenty-eight. He outclassed all, one after another. Never was he knocked out. Twice he made a drawn battle of it—and more! Four times he did not get the referee's decision. But when one carefully reads again the controversy that the master evoked in the journals of the day, one realises that in the case of those meetings when his superiority was disputed there were intrigues and dirty doings on which it is better not to dwell.

Ten years, twenty years went by. He continued to be emperor of the ring, the Invincible. He still had his magnificent presence; he carried his huge shoulders like a glorious burden, and his muscles were at least as hard as those of the gladiator who makes his perennial pose in the National Museum.

After being champion of the world, as is well known, for five following years, he only lost the title in the sixth year by his neglect of training. With one voice the sporting Press of two worlds declared that he would have done with Gus Jibson as with the others

if he had wished. But he preferred at that date to take it easy.

Then he had enough of being always victor, or never really beaten. Gradually he withdrew, and when at sixty he announced his definite retirement from boxing in favour of running a tavern in New York, our big Yerre was still the Invincible. Never had he bitten the dust of the ring. Always had he been standing at the end of each fight. He had kept himself as superbly upright as a statue that is bolted to its pedestal, the statue of a smiter of men. Glory to our great Otis Yerre from the nation and the world!

The news of his retirement was beginning to get round when J. S. Floyd, the Canadian manager, took the floor one fine day and launched on him a challenge that was almost an insult. The blood of the strenuous champion boiled, and forthwith he besought the indispensable Jim Sharpe to arrange the terms of a meeting between himself and the unknown boxer in whose name Floyd had just expressed himself in offensive terms. And the spectators howled with glee—once more they were to see the great old Yerre in the ring!

The adversary who thus forced the veteran to give battle, a young man called Dick M'Cue, was the son of the man whom Yerre had once upon a time so knocked out that only the trumpets of the Last Day were likely to waken him.

At the time of his father's violent death Dick was quite young. Later he learned the details of the last fight, and in his childish heart there grew an immense

hate for the formidable brute who had needlessly orphaned him, and a stubborn hunger for vengeance.

Patiently, modestly he trained himself, and avoided the booths and towns where clamorous posters multiplied the name of the accursed crack. He travelled Australia, England, and France, which was beginning to awake from its apathy of anti-sport and at last to understand great ideas. He attained splendid and intelligent strength. When he believed himself of sufficient might to beat down the enemy, he went in search of him, and succeeded in bringing him back into the arena by the means I have related.

In this fight—an unforgettable one, by the Thunderer!—the conditions were not fair and equal. The difference in age was too great, there's no denying it. Compact and solid as the old oak-tree showed himself, perfect as was the structure of the matchless champion's arms, the fight began badly for him. A great fear crept into the hearts of the good citizens. It was hardly likely, after all, that the antiquated machinery of the old man could stand against such youthful vigour. Was the spotless glory of Otis Yerre going to be spoiled by a knock-out?

No! The old grey bear triumphed again! I will not describe to you the incidents of the most dramatic prize-fight I have ever seen. But I cannot help mentioning the two on his jaw in the first round that got his adversary "groggy" at once; nor the two swings of the second round—a right on the ear and another in the stomach; nor the finishing blow—the irresistible straight on the solar plexus.

In short, incredible as it may seem, Will Eden was

put to sleep like a nursling—he had dropped his real name in view of his avenging intent—and hired himself to a hairdresser somewhere in the provinces.

After this fight Otis Yerre left the rope-encircled stage for ever. What an affecting scene was the farewell ceremony! Dan Simons, though he had been hangman at Detroit, wept. Yerre made a speech, and we all of us drank for three days as though finally to banish thirst.

* * * * *

In the clean sunlight of April no place is so pretty as Hockney Hill. There are little paths, as straight as though drawn on paper; glistening pebbles, like eggs of painted china; and turf so fine that you might upholster furniture with it.

A very old man came and sat down in one of the most tenderly green corners of Hockney Hill. Though colossal, he was all broken down, and he wagged an enormous white head that you would take at a distance for the scalped skull of a lion. The prodigious ruin let himself fall on a green seat, and looked at the fields and the gardens with blue eyes that wept all alone in the depth of sockets where one could bury his fist.

His attention was drawn by a little object that moved along the path and seemed to be drawing near. "He, he, ha, ha," stuttered the old man in amusement.

His eyes, still of use, discovered when the little object was ten paces away that it was a child of five or six years, who held his clogs in his hand as he toddled along.

The child went straight up to the old man and

planted himself before him. "You are Otis Yerre?" he demanded.

"My word, it's very likely!" laughed the jovial dodderer.

"Well," said the child. "I'm Bob M'Cue, the grandson of Phil and the son of Dick. And I'm going to knock you out!"

So saying, he squared himself for fight.

Somewhat abashed, the old champion half opened a gleaming mouth. He shut it again to swallow a painful swing. Then, smack!—he collected a double hook. Painfully he lifted his huge and fleshless hands in defence; he attempted a slow and uncertain reply, but he was mastered, hammered, borne down by the diminutive descendant of his victims—so thoroughly that he groaned, rolled bleeding down, and lay with his face to the ground, motionless.

Very gravely the child counted out ten. And as the ruins of the old man made no movement, the conqueror stood on tiptoe, gave a little cockcrow of victory, and went away.

FATE?

ALONG the bare wall there was a window, opened upon the evening—like a picture that never ended. There were also the faces of the two old friends, as little expressive as those of statues.

They were ending their days side by side, creeping into the same corners of sunshine and shade, awaiting the hours in the same rooms; and they talked now and then.

"All is error. There is only Fate," said old Dominic, by way of conclusion to something he had said or thought he had said.

"No," replied old Claud; "Fate makes mistakes too, like the rest."

The first speaker turned and looked at his companion with a little compassion and a little scorn, but no surprise. It was natural that he should wander a little, at his age.

The other wagged his head and the divided, emaciated neck that recalled a bundle of sticks, and tapped his knee with the dry wood of his hand. "And there are irreparable things," he added, "which are repaired."

"Ah!" murmured Dominic. He raised towards heaven his frail eyes in their red caskets, uneasy to think that soon, perhaps, he too would talk nonsense.

"I married Bernardine once upon a time," said

Claud. "I had almost forgotten her. But the other day I saw a girl who was much like her. Therefore I saw her again and she returned wholly into my thoughts. I married her; and two months before, I had shattered the head of her father with a shot from a gun."

Dominic was seized with sudden fear in the idea that his companion was deliriously dreaming, and thus he himself was all alone in the room. "Eh, Claud! Are you asleep?" he cried, trembling violently.

"No," said Claud, "I am thinking, without sleeping. I married the girl all right, and I sent her father a bullet through the forehead, right enough. First I must say that she adored her father and that he repaid it in full."

"That's a long time ago," said Dominic, appeased, and become again discreet as a listening child.

"Yes, so long that it seems to me as if I were speaking of some one else, and that all that was *before me.*"

All at once the old man resumed the fluent tongue of yore, discovering it like a memory:

"Old man Barbeau was shrewd and honest. So he did not wish me to marry his daughter, because I was a good-for-nothing. I was good for nothing, in truth, but to love the daughter, and like those who only do one thing, I did that one well. It is not possible to be captivated by any one as I was by that woman, who afterwards grew old and has been dead so long—you must listen, Dominic."

"Yes," said Dominic, and he drew nearer.

"He was unwilling then. Every one about him tried to make him change his mind, but he pretended

not to hear, or not to understand. They durst not go too far, for he was irascible and strong, with a wrestler's arms, and hands as hard as tools. Myself, I dared to speak to him one day, straight to his face, but very softly; and he threw me out of the door, while the beautiful Bernardine stuck herself in a corner of the kitchen and sniffled, with her fists in her eyes. I was mad with impotence and shame, and I said, 'I will kill myself.' What mattered my life henceforth, when he who held the joy and the charm of it was perverse as the devil and strong as an ox? Every new overture ended but in increased embarrassment for me in the sight of others. It seemed to me much easier to have done with life. I put a bullet into my gun, and having chosen a fine night—like the lover that I was—I ran straight ahead into the country. I sat down, to do the job, on the edge of the road, near the Briquet corner. But hardly had I finally grasped my gun when I heard, and then saw, a carriage approaching. With twitching heart I knew it for that of old Barbeau, and I remembered that it was indeed the night of the month when he was wont to take a bag of money to Madame Templier. The horse was walking. The carriage passed close to my face, and I saw him, bent forward, with his great massive and hateful body, his beaky nose, his big pointed beard, his savage black outline, like that of a negro king. To see thus sprawling before me the brute who was driving me to the worst extremity, filled me with unspeakable rage. I rose with a jump, took aim at his forehead, and fired. In a lump and without a cry he plunged head foremost and fell on the horse's rump,

which took fright and galloped off, left the road at the corner, and threw himself, fifty paces further, right into the Loviots' farm. I ran away, ran away as fast as I could, dizzy, stunned, ruined. And I had already got a long way in my mad hurry when I began to understand what I had done. But no less desperately spurred for that, I rushed over the fields and woods, as I remember, all the same, as if it was yesterday, I who have forgotten nearly all of the past, the awful thickets I won through that night, all the tragical barriers I upset to get by. Scarcely did the certainty that I should kill myself when I got home put a little calm and order into the whirlwind of my thoughts. But now I saw that my accursed flight had taken me to *their* house—the one that *he* had just left, but where *she* was. When *I* knew it, I was too near to resist the temptation to see her again—to see her again through her window, looking out, vaguely revealed in the shadow by the reflection from the fire! I followed the wall along, panting and rustling as little as possible, and turned the corner. Ah, the window was open, and she was there, with her arms on the sill! She was there, angelically pale, and it seemed to me that something had even made her radiant. Yes, she was smiling! She saw me standing a few paces from her, uttered a little cry and clapped her hands; she beamed still more, and smiled more sweetly!

" 'Heaven has sent you,' she said. 'Father consents! He saw how I was suffering, and suddenly he said yes, to cure me. Before he went out, just now, he said yes, and he laughed!'

"I could not even cry out. I was choked and blind. I do not know how I recoiled, how I crept from her gaze, how I escaped. I only remember the moment I arrived home, one groping hand in front, the other clenched on my gun—the only treasure left to me in the world! In the kitchen, without even making a light, without even opening my eyes, I sought and found the kind cartridge, and loaded the gun. But I was so borne down by the cruelty of the Fate that was undoing me—and how terribly!—without allowing me the time to know that it had saved me, that I no longer had mettle even in destroying myself. Is that why the bullet missed? Be that as it may, I felt only the scorch of the blast, and only was a tuft of hair shot away. I reeled and fell to the ground, believing myself dead—but alive.

"I awoke in the full light of noonday, and came to myself groaning, with a booming in my ears. But there was a big noise outside as well—a tumultuous swarming of people. And just then John knocked on my door with his fist—he was my elder brother by several years, and died of old age. With another stroke he opened the door, and putting his face in, he cried, 'Old Barbeau was murdered last night on the road.'

" 'Ah!' I cried, livid, recoiling to the far end of the room.

" 'Those two gipsies of ill omen,' he added, 'they were found by the bag that they'd carried off. They've told everything! They attacked the carriage at the end of the village, close to his home. The old man got ten knife wounds in the back. He was killed

outright, and there's a pool of blood. Then they put him back on his seat, and let the horse go on, walking. A long time after, at the Briquet corner, the horse threw himself into the Loviots' farm.'

"I had not killed him! For he was already dead! You cannot murder a dead man. Fate *was* in it, you see, but she made a mistake that night."

IMMOBILITY

THE old charwoman, who had gone to the Michalons that morning as usual, came out again at once as if she had been thrown out. She fell on her knees in the middle of the village street with horror-stricken face, and a sort of cry in her throat that she could neither swallow nor utter.

Ah, it was not without cause that she had foundered so completely in the street, the fat old charwoman whom we had to pass round before we could enter the house! Of big Michalon we could at first see only his long outstretched legs, emerging from the darkness under the table, and the vast boot-soles that stood vertically on the floor-stones. You would never believe how terrifying those immense soles were to see upright on their heels, standing up from the ground like two posts in the half-light of that basement room whose corners were tense with darkness.

We stooped, we extended ourselves towards the space under the table, towards the dread nest of shadow. The body of the giant lay there, black as mould, on stones that were smeared with a new red lacquer. The face? It was hidden by a folded arm, of which the hand trailed and soaked on the pavement.

They lifted this arm to reveal the face. The great dead arm trembled in the hand that gripped it.

"He's not stiff yet," they said.

Assuredly, the crime was recent—quite near to us. We looked awkwardly at the door, with a confused vision of the murderer in our eyes—that frightful visitor! Then our looks returned together—for we were united in a sort of infirmity—to the face, the face which gradually, as we grew used to the half-light, appeared at our feet.

We could not see it clearly. Ah, my friends, that was because it had shape no longer! It had been hammered, crushed. Flat-nosed and broken, it looked like the face of a lion. It shone all over when we brought a lighted candle near.

It indicated no terror or rage or anguish,—nothing. It was too far destroyed to express agony. We could not know what sort of outcry or groan had prolonged the black opening of the mouth.

We turned away, then, from the man changed into a monster.

"The other one?" some one hazarded.

The other? He was there, for certain, since he was unable to stir.

We saw him indeed, with his ghastly face, in his usual corner, glued to the back of the armchair, his hands hanging like rags on the arms.

The paralytic! This old man, who had come to spend near his only relation the rest of a life lived elsewhere, had been stricken with disease a year or more. He had vegetated for a year, totally helpless, rooted in that armchair.

The little life left to him was tenacious. His feeble breath remained fast fixed in some corners of his frame, and the secret, obstinate pit-pat of his heart

kept time with the oozing of his gums upon his lips. A bluish gleam floated in his eye, and now and then a look seemed to liquefy in the middle of his flabby, creamy face. He saw, and perhaps he thought; but to move one single finger, that was forbidden him! In the hands of the charwoman he was like an empty coat.

"Ah," I murmured, "he saw, and he knows!"

"That's true!" said the others, grimacing.

Imagine the horror of the butchery done quite close to him who was no more use than a lifeless thing to protect his good companion, his benevolent relation! Who knows even if the assassin had seen him—this half-dead man, enshrouded but unburied?

Such were the nightmare glimpses, the disturbing theories that assailed us all—for meanwhile the whole village had come running upon our heels.

Then came the police, for the pursuit of the murderer.

It was not difficult to find the guilty one. Taking no precaution, he had allowed accusing clues to remain. Undoubtedly he was a brute. So at two in the afternoon, with no hesitation in their quest, the police surprised him on the edge of a spinney, bound him and led him away. A brute indeed he was, with his rotund trunk like a bundle of dirty linen, his head bristling with yellow hair, and a beard as hard as a boar's bristles.

The savage tried clumsily to simulate insanity by means of a series of ape-like antics and little inarticulate cries. But pressed with pitiless proofs, he took refuge in silence and lowered the couch-grass mass of

his rough head. When they showed him the blood-bespattered stick he put the finishing touch to the matter by losing countenance, and they saw his slug-like lips tremble among the quills of his beard. Yet he confessed nothing, and still less agreed to tell, in spite of police wiles and cajolery, where he had hidden the iron-bound casket which, as everybody knew, contained the money.

However, our poor big Michalon would have been quickly avenged if suspicion had not fallen the same day, and been followed by multiplying evidence, on a gipsy who had been at our door on the fatal night, at an hour which coincided with the speculations of justice.

The other man was an honest idiot. Opinion went right-about-face in his favour. But things muddled themselves so far and so well that they could never say which of the two had robbed and killed, though confident that it was one or the other. Of the iron-bound casket there was no trace! Willy-nilly, the magistrate had to get out of it by declaring "no case" generally.

As for me, this uncertainty touching the criminal vexed me curiously. I took the matter to heart, captivated first by a desire and then by a passion, to know the truth.

But neither my willingness nor my personal enquiries brought me any result, and like the magistrate I was forced to be content to abandon the mysterious problem.

I did this with such an ill grace that my disposition and even my health suffered. I became nervous!

And that accounts for the careless folly which induced me a few weeks later, one night when I was driving home, to flog my horse, the skittish Pierrot—and a storm raging, too!

What had to happen did happen, in the last half-mile, and in sight of the houses. Pierrot bolted. I spare you the details of how that runaway horse dashed into the narrow streets in the midst of the dense darkness, of whirling water, and lightning flashes.

In bewilderment I grazed along walls, and a breath of their dreadful nearness reached me as we sped. Should I jump out? Suddenly a frightful shock was followed by a light that burst forth. It seemed to me that a wall had been rent asunder, and before I rolled in the mud *I saw!*

I lay on the ground, gasping, shuddering, distracted—not by reason of the shock or the danger, nor of Death which had touched me and passed by; but because of what I had seen!

The wall, as I said, gaped open. The shaft of the carriage had smashed in the shutter of a little bolted window, and through that gaping wound my glance had rushed into a room.

I saw a man, standing and stooping over an iron-bound casket, in which his hands were stirring gold coins. I saw the big back of that man tremble at the crash of the shattered shutter; I saw one hand go out towards a gnarled stick that I knew. Above all, I saw the ghastly face that had borrowed the tawny gleam of the gold—and yes, the rush of the gale did not put the lamp out soon enough to hide that face from me.

It was the paralytic. It was the murderer!

It was the strange, the supernatural shammer, plotter of the most tangled and hellish of crimes—a crime that I shall unravel by degrees, but whose bewildering riddle I possess at last. It was the monster whose imperturbable fortitude and patience had played for a year the sinister rôle of a lifeless thing! And for a moment, stunned by a plethora of thoughts, I lay paralysed—because *he* was there, so near—he whose immobility was victorious, and reigned like that of idols, like that of the earth.

FOR all those reasons, and for many others," continued the foul person, "I had decided to kill that rich old lady."

With eyes that were streaked with alcoholic lines he regarded his huge hands, hooked and grey, planted before him like two crabs. Then our ignoble speaker went on:

"Her name? I won't tell you it—not at all because I'm afraid, for by now the term of the warrant has amply passed—but because I don't remember it. Anyway, let her be called Mother So-and-so or Madame Thingumbob, it's none the less true that she was as rich as I was poor, that she was putting by much more than I was running into debt for in the village, that she was as stingy in her food as I wasn't in drink; in short, that there was, on purpose, too much difference for it to last between this independent lady, overwhelmed by old age, and the young workman without a job that I was.

"So it was necessary, then, for me to do away with her. She lived in the big house, which still exists such as it is, opposite the miserable stone hut where I was burrowing before the affair in question. She went to bed every day at seven o'clock except in summer, when she stayed up till half-past. Infallibly she got up at four, and that suddenly, like a jack-in-the-box,

and began to rove about the house in the black dark, the grey, or the dull pink, according to the season.

"Her hoard was hidden in a rotten sabot, mixed with other sabots and rubbish that encumbered the windowless pantry that led out of her room. An unheard-of chance, a heavenly miracle, had let me know about the sabot. From then it was natural that the idea of taking that prize should spur me on, even though I should, in passing, put the objectionable old lady definitely out of action.

"This so simple and humane idea, one which all of you would have had in my place, I remained a long time without realising, I confess. Although I pleaded guilty every time I saw the vixen go by with her yellow hair, her yellowish face, and a trailing leg hitched behind the other—so used up and thin that one wondered by what chance her bones still hung together—still I did not act.

"One afternoon, however, when Poursin had called to me from his shop door that he'd take me to court for that everlasting trifle of thirty-three and a half francs, the afternoon when I went to dig Blanchissot's asparagus bed (that's what he was called), uneasiness came over me. What if the old woman died of senility, and the heirs publicly stole the hoard! Or if some one else adopted my plan, and, more prudent than I, did what I ought to have done! A slight trembling tickled my spine. Although alone, I snarled aloud, and resolved to do it that night.

"At ten o'clock, when it was as dark as inside a pudding, I got up. I put on two jackets, one on top of the other, and two pairs of trousers, shoved my

knife and my pipe in my pocket, and took my lantern under my arm. Then I opened the door and crossed the road, with no end of precaution, for it was so dark—I think I've told you that already—you couldn't poke your finger in your eye.

"I reached the enemy house. My foot stumbled against the step, my hand touched the wood of the door and then groped, flitting like a bat, up to the latch. The bolt was shot, and resisted with all its might. But I knew that by leaning on the door one got a half-open line of access. Through this slender cleft the point of a knife would find room to penetrate and get a hold on the staple.

"Thanks to this method, I opened the door of the house where the odious old woman kept the money. I also broke the point of my knife on the job, and it fell with a little sharp noise on the floor-tiles. I did not linger to pick it up, but put back the knife in my pocket. I shut the door, trying with all the might of my muscles to go slowly and lightly, to make no more noise than the clock was making, with its death-like breathing.

"Slowly, with one hand outstretched, like a blind ghost, I advanced towards the fireplace. I knew that the infernal old lady's matches were above, in a round tin box. I grasped them with a shudder, as if already I was fingering the first of the treasure that lay hidden there, protected by the creature's body. I lit the lantern. Then I slid the tin box, which impeded my hands, into my pocket.

"I steered towards the door of the bedroom, not without a collision that made my pipe fall from my

overfull pocket. I went into the room with the lantern and the knife.

"It was a quick job—two minutes perhaps. Then I got at the precious rubbish of which I had thought for months as other people think of heaven. When I pulled the bundle of notes out of the dirty old sabot and the heap of old lumber scattered and bristling there, it seemed to me as if I were a wizard, working a miracle, and bringing something back to life!

"I lost no time in wondering, but recrossed the bedroom. I looked at the bed. I saw—I saw—in short, I was reassured. I passed my hand over my moist forehead. The movement made my cap fall, almost at the foot of the bed. Following it with my eyes, I saw my knife, lying on the floor. I had let it fall inadvertently, just before. So it was beached on the floor in the middle of—of what had run down. Quickly I turned away, quitted all that, regained the outer room, and skirted the walls and the fireplace, where the deep ashes muffled the sound of my steps, although I had on my big iron-shod boots—so big that people made game of them in the village.

"The door—it was so dark that I bumped the wall near the threshold, and broke the glass of my lantern. The harsh noise of the falling glass set me trembling and affected me so that, a moment later, with a nervous movement, I dropped the lantern itself on the road, which I had reached at last.

"A few steps—and I was at home. I pushed the door—never fast shut, however—and without even taking the trouble to close it, I undressed. With feverish haste I threw my boots, trousers and jacket

in a corner, and I took easily understandable pains not to touch a stain that the coat had on one side.

"That done, I went barefoot and buried the nice soft notes in Blanchissot's asparagus bed—there was only a grass meadow to cross.

"An hour later I was snoring—although all the cold in space blew on me through the open door.

"And then, my good, my excellent sirs," the infamous brute concluded, "all came off as I had intended.

"Justice arrived in the form of a person got up entirely in black. And this man, who looked like a widower, had a little gleam in his eye when he picked the knife up on the spot and they told him it was mine. He showed agitation when the ownership of the cap was also made clear to him by the spectators. He started when he learned that the pipe was also mine. But he frowned when he knew the origin of the footprints left in the ashes—'Decidedly they're his big boots!' He shrugged his shoulders nervously when they found on the road between *our* two houses the carcass of my lantern, and uttered an ill-tempered exclamation when he ascertained that the door of my house had remained wide open all the night.

"He altered at that moment, and a sneering smile adorned the rigid wooden lines of his face. He nodded his head with an understanding air when they pulled my blood-stained clothes from behind my bed, and murmured, 'To be sure!' When the round box rolled on the floor he said, 'I'd have bet on it!' At the first words which I stammered, with my face drawn with fright as though by threads, to tell him

I thought I had dreamed that some people had come into my room during the night, he looked at me with all the kindness his ugly face could manage, and said to me, 'I knew it, my friend!'

"In short, I had piled up so much obvious evidence against me that I had cleared myself! He who tries to prove too much proves nothing! In life, one should know how to make use of proverbs, which at bottom are very well done.

"A single little imprudence would have marked me out as the culprit. Ten huge imprudences indicated me positively to all as the man who had not done it. By dint of blackening myself, I was turned into the unfortunate victim of barbarous plots, sewn together with scarlet thread as the man in mourning said.

"That was my way. Whether new or old, it's good. I make a present of it to those imaginative people who are tempted by adventure, or to those who are satisfied to set up their schemes in silly old books, and devote their lucrative ideas to business."

THE WATCHMAN

THE palings stretched out and out, like innumerable figures of men, around the future section of the future town. For they had decided—up there or down there, at New York or Montreal, I don't know where—to make a town there.

While waiting for this tract of prairie (where old-style farmers smoked their pipes up to the last minute) to be changed into a new town, with its branch of the National Bank, its Chamber of Commerce, its two universities, its four cinemas, and its five Dissenting Chapels, the huge slice of Canadian territory presented an intermediate appearance. It was a marsh, a dirty marsh, crowded with building-stone, prickly with scaffolding, perforated by gas-lamps with the diameter of a well; here the world of work-people employed by the company swarmed and waded.

I was one of them. Bill Nogg, Sam Sharp, and Joe McColl were, too; and Jep Joyce as well, though he was not so all the time, on account of the dram of alcohol that fell on his fate, and of the adventure to which we are coming without seeming to, just as in life.

In course of time, at the season of the two general meetings of the Company—they talked about those meetings, but I never understood what they were—we worked day and night. But in the early

days every gang left the building-yard at nightfall, and it remained through the night as empty as the tavern was on Sundays and the chapels on week-days.

Every night Mr. Pew, the man with the terrible spectacles, placed a watchman in the yard, arming him with peremptory instructions and two revolvers, huge enough to machine-gun a village.

Nothing was more necessary than this watchman; for the yard, with its alleys and holes and corners, might easily have become a lair or den; and besides, the copper cable heaped up there stood for a marketable value that we did not fail to appreciate.

Without wishing to disparage ourselves wantonly, I must tell you that we were all merry fellows of dubious standing, either because they knew nothing of our antecedents, or because they knew them too well. You will understand that you could not demand certificates of integrity, signed by the Pope or General Booth, from gentlemen who bore a burden of hard labour and were thousands of miles from the nearest centre of civilisation. It was necessary to rely on citizens who had some motive for remaining remote from the said centre.

However, there were among us, by the way of contrast, two men who were integrity and honesty incarnate; Joshua Simpson, and that Jep Joyce of whom I told you just now in a way, I hope at least, that excited your curiosity.

So Mr. Pew, the spectacled under-manager, had chosen Jep at once as night watchman, and every evening, after he had installed him, he came away gleefully striking the muddy ground with his stick, his

bat-like cloak flapping widely in the wind, his owl-like face grinning with content.

Mr. Pew, who hardly ever slept, used to return in vain to the yard, no matter what the time, slipping about in the mud, and poke his pointed nose over the top of the palings or into the crevice between two boards—Jep was there at his post in the shadows, standing, head erect, his two great revolvers tugging at his arms like bundles.

Then over the physiognomy of Mr. Pew there defined itself a devilish grimace, which was no other than a smile.

From the month of May to the month of July brave Jep did not cease to be the faultless watchman. We used to get a glimpse of him in the evening, when he woke up. What a bearing the chap had! Never a strong word nor a sign of obscenity. I'll be damned if he knew where the Godmother's Arms was! If you offered him a glass, he politely refused—like Joshua in that, who seized the chance of such invitations to turn up his eyeballs and talk to you about his mother and sister.

Now, one night in July Mr. Pew, whose meagre body was an untiring machine, approached by moonlight the west fence of the yard, among the gleaming puddles.

The poor fellow was obliged to grip the stakes with those hands that were dry as his nails! Outlined against the bluish sky, on the top of a pile of squared stones, our Jep was doing a reeling dance!

He was drunk! How could he, he who had till then been so impenetrable by alcohol of any sort or colour,

how could he have yielded to the general affection for that devil of a drug? It was a mystery. The fact is, however, that he was colossally, phantasmagorically tipsy.

The old boy vibrated, summoned up his strength, tightened the strings of his tendons, hurled himself to the gate and through it, climbed the limestone hillock at the top of which the other man continued his marionette dance under the pallor of the sky, seized Jep, turned him and toppled him down, dragged him out of the yard, and threw the heavy mass into a rut.

And Jep forthwith went to sleep in the rut, blissful, and gazing at the moon.

Mr. Pew, all a-flutter, his thin grey cloak flapping about him, ran to the huts where we lodged, and after several thumps on the shutters, with scolding and persuasive clamour, took Joshua away.

He established Joshua in the yard, after having rapidly explained how great a hop Jep had become, and put into his hand a revolver—the other having doubtless fallen among the stone blocks at the time of Jep's expulsion.

This done, Mr. Pew went to bed. Ah, his was a sterling nature, and you may look where you will, my dear friends, to find his equal, now that the old box of tricks is broken and its fragments confined by fate at the bottom of a coffin!

All this that I have related happened pell-mell at nine p.m. Towards midnight the rut where Jep was piled up stirred and groaned.

It was Jep, awaking. The cold was intense. The peculiar thing about drunkards who are sobered by

cold is, as you know, that they cannot recall the circumstances which accompanied the period of intoxication. With haggard face he yawned, and if one may say so, he yawned with his eyes as well. He looked about him, saw nothing, lifted his right fist and found his revolver, lifted his left fist to his face and verified that it held no revolver; then he felt a dull pain in his back.

A moment later, extended and erect, he remembered suddenly that he ought to have been, at this hour of the night, in the yard and protecting it. His memory whispered nothing more to him.

He trudged towards the gate contrived in the palings, almost smelling the way, for the moon had drowned itself somewhere. He sought his key, entered, and with the weapon in his fist resumed his vigil as if nothing had happened, rigid and alert as a snare!

The top of his head was still a bit turbid, befogged by a sort of bad dream gone away; but the conception of his professional duty was so riveted in the brain and heart of the man that before he became himself again he became the perfect watchman!

And now, quite naturally, behold our Jep as he suddenly starts and outstretches his neck towards a shadow that moves, down there, at the foot of the hillock of building-stone. He himself was planted like a lighthouse just at the end of the storehouse of iron girders. He cried, "Who goes there?" Echo replied precisely, "Who goes there?" and in the black silence there were two little clicks, the kind produced in opening the locks of certain revolvers.

Three days later, while we were taking poor Joshua and poor Jep to the cemetery side by side—just as they had been picked up—we said to ourselves that one may sometimes be a criminal and yet not be a criminal, and that there are accursed complications in life!

But above all, my companions and I, we who were but lately acquainted with the convict-prison and other places, it grieved us to be condemned never again to see Joshua and Jep. Their eyes were so frank and honest that we had never looked upon anything here below more beautiful than their faces.

BLIND JUSTICE

ASSUREDLY," said J. K. Alec Columbus, "I'm no great shakes. Without being, properly speaking, a rascal, I've been so much associated with rough people in the Klondyke country that I can't swear I've always been exactly a saint. Bah! In our trade, adventurers and hunters, scattered by the winds, isolated in solitude without end, and chopped up with cold, little slips don't matter. And doesn't it seem very nice, nevertheless, to be administering the laws of good old Britannia in a country hooked somewhere up there to the Arctic Circle, where the trams are drawn by dogs, where people die like flies, and where towns spring up like mushrooms?"

Our speaker emptied a glass of whiskey, put it down, poured out another and drank that too; for he could not bear either full glasses or empty ones. Then he looked out, from the bow window of his little bungalow at Epsom where we were, upon the English landscape—green, yellow and red, so clean and tidy that it seemed just to have received the last touch of varnish and come straight out of the shop.

He had himself brought back from the North American lands, where he had gathered wealth, a taste for rich colours. He was bedecked in a green waistcoat and a blood-red tie; and his great head, set

on his broad and glistening collar with turned-down points, was comparable to a sirloin on a dish.

"However that may be," he went on, "I was a seraphim by the side of Daniel Coffin Buttershaw. This damned Dan was a shameful scamp. Now that the time has gone by, and I've thought about it, I'm more and more sure that Danny killed the old Jew shopkeeper.

"That story is a surprising one. It's one of the most curious that we used to tell five years ago, on the trail, during the spare moments in journeys so devilishly long that you could follow the stages from week to week on a map of the world no bigger than your hand.

"Now my Coffin Buttershaw was evidently the murderer of the unfortunate trader, who was found by the light of the moon with his nose to the ground, and his beard so frozen into the snow that it had to be thawed out with matches. There was no doubt about it in my mind or in that of the lurid scoundrel's friends; he had done the job for a dirty matter of a money-bag. We hoped greatly to see him hanged. Unfortunately, no sort of proof could be brought against him, and we had to bury the matter along with the Jew. We were forced, too, we who were Danny's companions, to continue his company as before, to laugh at his jokes, and prepare damned schemes with him; these are of the necessities of existence. The robber! I can see him now as I see you, with his snout-like face, his rat's eyes, his bristling, fish-bone moustache, and his grilled cheeks. He was skinny as a rail, his joints were terribly knotted, and nothing

was funnier than to see him stop in front of you, waving his lobster-like claws at the end of his emaciated arms. Ah, the bankrupt cur!

"In short, off we went again into the country, him, me, and two other gold-seekers of the same stamp, having on our consciences either a crime, like him, or a few deals of a delicate sort, like me. And willy-nilly we were obliged to work together in a sort of partnership.

"Then, one fine day, Coffin left us. Or rather we left him. Hem! How can I explain that? You'll understand me in the end. You must know that one Innonit, arrived from the North, told my two other companions and myself that there was an unknown gold-field, some months' march away from Fort Yukon, towards the frontier of the Dominion. Instinctively—what? We didn't breathe a word of it to Coffin. Certainly we were partners with him. But that doesn't alter the fact that one-third's worth more than a quarter, eh? And then we remembered, exactly at that moment, the story of the Jew, and—better late than never—we realised all the horror there was in living with such a brigand. Besides, our action was much more excusable because that ass of an Innonit had had us disgustingly, and his gold-field had no existence. (I have never since thought again about that brute, so much it hurts me that I didn't strangle him.)

"I've told you enough about him for you to understand with what speed and what precautions we abandoned our Coffin one morning on the road—if I may put in that way. He was so full of whiskey that he

would not wake up within six hours from then—unless he preferred to have apoplexy. That was *his* look-out, eh? *He* hadn't asked for the Jew's opinion when he left him, after putting him to sleep with his face in the snow!

"What happened to us, then? First, disappointments, failures, adventures, and herculean labour. After we had undergone all that, I returned to England rich, and settled down in this place, which I bought honestly.

"And what happened to *him?* I found out afterwards and am going to tell you. Being without resources—naturally we had taken certain precautions concerning the dangerous blackguard—he hired himself on to a farm in the nearest gold-bearing district. He worked hard, from morning to night and from night to morning, for he backed out of nothing, not even work, and he hoped—the son of vermin!—to put a little money by, and so be able to plunge again into the pursuit of gold, and of us! So for two months he worked with all his might, demolishing the jobs of a beast of burden. The farmer was delighted to have such an all-round machine in his service, and for those two months Coffin led a really exemplary life.

"But one midnight, behold, some men broke in upon the little niche where he was sleeping, the cattle-shed being chock-full on account of new-born beasts. These men were the sheriff and four powerful fellows who constituted the police force of the neighbourhood. They shook friend Coffin without any consideration. Bewildered and heavy with sleep, yawning, grumbling,

and opening the right eye and the left eye in turn, he was hauled outside, half dressed.

" 'No resistance, my lad,' said the sheriff, 'they saw you do the job.'

" 'What job?' growled our ex-friend, who was beginning to get cross about this manœuvre in the icy air.

"As they believed him rebellious, the most formidable of the force advanced and administered the knock-out in half a round.

"When he came round, the sheriff was in front of him, in a little guard-house where a stove was snoring; and he was adjured to tell the whole truth touching the murder of the old girl.

"Yes, exactly. Daniel Coffin Buttershaw was accused of having sent into another world a hoary-headed lady whom he'd never seen! At first stupefied, the scamp floundered and shouted and stormed. But alas!—I say 'alas' on *his* account, of course—a terrible bundle of circumstances overwhelmed him. He had been seen where the crime had taken place; the knife which had pierced the venerable victim was his. He defended himself badly. When confronted with the little mummy, his bearing was adjudged cynical. He could not prove an alibi. Losing his head, he accused everybody of the crime, including the sheriff himself! In short, they put a rope round his neck one cold and snowy evening.

" 'Wait, wait, please!' cried some one who came up with his hair flying.

"He was a Catholic priest. The holy man had pre-

cise knowledge that Coffin was innocent, having heard the confession of the real culprit.

"But it happened—you know how ferocious local dislikes are in little places, and so it is no matter where—that the sheriff was on bad terms with the priest. So he looked on him satirically as he requested him, in that case, to name the guilty party. As the priest refused, pleading the secrecy of the confessional, the sheriff turned to the hangman and bade him hoist the culprit into the air.

"While the hangman was obeying, the priest, held back by two policemen, gesticulated and stammered—'It's an abominable injustice, a monstrous crime! God will curse you! Beware of his malediction!'

"And a thousand other things of the same sort.

"God! I can imagine that He, who had from high heaven seen all Coffin's life-time from the first act, must rather have smiled some."

THE WAG

THE life led by His Gracious Majesty's troops at Dorsahabad was infinitely, rigidly mournful. The district defined in the inferno of the North-West, the limit of the vast Indian continent. It was bare, consisting merely of a marsh, the green spectre of meadows.

In the middle of this territory—which would have been a sea in Europe, but here was dwindled to a puddle—the Empire's boundary submerged itself, the line where the English universe fits into Asia.

The station was an important one because of that frontier. Sorrowfully as it arose out of the marshland, by the side of the heap of streets that looked like a cemetery and was really the town, our little fort was placed like a landmark on a world's threshold. That became clear, sometimes and suddenly, when we happened to descry with the field-glass, far away yonder to the North, a horseman in an astrakhan cap.

And that is why we were so many and so select in this derelict southern barracks.

That also is why, one year, in the heart of our regiment, there were those frightful outrages, and those three bombs.

The bombs were thrown by men disguised as soldiers who had mixed themselves among us. The affair was Anarchist or Fenian. Anarchists are inver-

tebrate sociologists; Fenians are Irishmen gone rotten. The Committee, lurking somewhere in the United States, and having at their command the unlimited wealth of traitors, had decided to destroy the staff of one of the outermost Indian garrisons by way of a big stroke that would be within the whole world's vision.

The long arm of the Committee had scattered its emissaries in the North. Planted in the fort, in the form of old soldiers, and by no one knows what infernally patient plotting, the ringleaders aimed at exploding mutiny and dynamite.

The mutiny miscarried. As for the bombs, unfortunately, they did not miss. But they only caused some wounds, which were soon cured. As for the perpetrators, three of them were cured radically. Others were put into safe keeping for life.

The Committee went to earth somewhere else, not without saying that they would begin over again. True, nobody could say where or when or how the Committee had said it.

In spite of the extensive weeding-out which followed, all we of the garrison set ourselves to keep our eyes open, to take notice—and watch.

A little later, ashamed that we had not unmasked the sinister sham soldiers, we applied ourselves to our own surveillance as to a duty and a fate, and I assure you that it would have needed a miracle for the impostures and outrages to begin again.

Pat set about it like the rest.

Pat was the good genius of the military exiles of

Dorsahabad, in the sense that their only diversion for years had been to laugh at him.

He did that on his own, too—Gad, didn't he!—and I've never met a merrier dog. He was an Irishman, from a root of strong quality. Indeed, he reminded you of a root by his knotty fingers and his greyish face, at once flattened and lumpy. But by way of amends for that plain aspect, nature had finished him off with a head of hair as scarlet as the gaudy mop of the clown in pantomime.

He was recognised and noticed everywhere by that clean red blot, as if he had carried a light. It put his face into uniform, so to speak, and crowned him as a great national joker.

In fact Pat had never—never, mind you, and I use the big word without flinching—let a chance go by of saying or doing some pleasantry, of carrying on like a marionette by the help of his wooden arms and legs or of cleaving with explosive laughter the cemented bas-relief of his face.

But in spite of this tireless foolery, in spite even of the "Bengal fire" so inadequately extinguished by his cap, this Pat was an excellent soldier. He could recite the verses of the drill manual backwards, and his courage was of countless proofs.

So in our life of internal watchfulness and self-examination, several circumstances proved that he was not the least zealous.

As for poking fun at those affairs of lurking anarchist ringleaders and the like, you may imagine he took the chance! He was always mimicking the conspirators.

Often in the non-coms' square of blinding light and crowding gossipers, you saw him appear enveloped in a big black cloak, and rattling with a whole armoury of weapons as he crept along the wall with all the necessary melodramatic mimicry. He used to crawl as far as the door, unmoved by our laughter, his wide mouth set with gravity, his big bluish eye steady as a night-light.

You follow me? The simple fact that they let him apply his tricks to that sort of souvenir will give you a much better idea of his popularity and ability than all my feeble remarks and poor descriptions—I who only know how to edit service reports and tickets.

One day he went farther; this time indeed he passed the limit. We were all there in the guard-room, awaiting the report of the officers who were assembled close by.

The black and obscure outline of Pat appeared in the doorway.

"How's that for a bomb!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

He came in, carrying an enormous bomb, with a piece of string hanging from it that looked red. The big devil showed all the signs of intense terror. He kept pretending to drop it, only to catch it again in flight with the clumsiness of the accomplished juggler, and uttering the little chuckles of a pretty woman. Assuredly, even if the vessel only contained harmless soup it would most certainly have spread itself over the neighbourhood! Luckily it was no such thing, and we were left unstained.

Then he hugged his bomb in his arms and pressed

it on his heart upside down. Then with little steps, and absurdly rigid, indicating the bomb with desperate excitement in his eyes, he placed it at the foot of the wall.

That done, he sighed and mopped his forehead, and as he looked at us a smile reflected our laughter on his spacious face. Then once more, grimaces and antics. He trembled on his long thin legs, pretended he had arrived at the limit of fright, jumped up with his feet together, bunged his ears up and went off at last like a whirlwind.

I was doing sentry-go at the door of the guard-room. Having gone just inside to watch the performance of our official jester, I resumed my post. In amusement I went a few paces into the yard, so that I could see the clown better as he galloped off with incredibly long strides—exactly like those with which comic artists extend the legs of sprinters in sketches.

To that action of mine I owed it that I was not mangled with the rest when the terrible explosion came that turned the frontier fort into a battlefield.

THE GREEN SPECTRE

THE Reverend Mr. Parish was as rigid as a corpse; he was alive all the same. From morning to night he devoted himself to all the pursuits enjoined by heaven upon a pastor and an upright man. He made certain the services of his denomination, preached, prayed, talked to his sons—sometimes as one preaches and sometimes as one prays—and even ventured into his little garden, to which his tall and mournful outline then gave the semblance of a cemetery.

His speech had no accentuation. His pale face had no expression; it had petrified itself into a statuette, and his wrinkles had become as invariable as the letters of his name.

It was not alone his feeling towards the sacerdotal life, his stern respect for principle, his inconsolable passion for perfection, that gave him that icy mien, that made the smiles of children fade away as he passed, and daunted the fleeting joy of life one has sometimes.

He bore an internal wound, the measureless remorse of a crime,—a crime done by his father in overt disobedience to God. The Reverend Abel Parish had, in fact, committed suicide.

Because of that suicide, Abel Parish was writhing in hell. This idea was unpleasant to his son, and it

embarrassed him, compared with him who had given him life, in preaching the necessary religion.

But this was not all. They who believe in and who practise the true faith know that generations are bound together by their acts as if with chains. The iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children, related people being, in the eyes of the Lord, only people that hang on to each other and drag themselves into the abyss.

How had the act come about? The pastor was always passionately putting the question to himself; and from time to time his conversation would suddenly cease, as he fell into urgent meditation that one respected. Or it fell on him when alone in the garden, black and notionless as a cypress.

One stormy night his father, on whose devout allegiance nothing had ever cast suspicion, had retired into the green room, and they found him there the following day, breathing his last behind the locked door.

Placed upon his bed, with his two sons standing by like funeral tapers, he had opened his eyes and stammered, "The Green Spectre!" Then he fainted, repeating the expression which to those present sounded like nothing good on the lips of a Christian.

The doctor bent down. He was young and anxious. Fraternally he announced to the young people that their father was dead. A little later they learned, as a result of the inquiry and of the doctor's evidence, that the author of their days had succumbed as the result of taking the devilish substance called arsenic into the stomach. They lowered their heads in foresight

of all the punishments to come, and from that day a huge melancholy fell upon them.

The younger had since died, and the older one bore alone—in this world, at least—all the family sorrow.

Often his steps led him to the green room in the summer-house, and often he entered the little retreat, where nothing had been altered since the accursed happening. Its paper hung in strips and had developed velvety stains of intense green.

Resting on the old seat—the shapeless and only witness of the unforgiven drama—the son would set himself stubbornly to find the reasons for his father's suicide.

Sometimes the fervency of the meditation, furiously persisted in for the sake of both knowledge and penance, seemed to pulverise his brain and cause visions. One evening he thought he saw something in green upright beside him. The little cry that he gave exorcised it. He was really alone in the pale room of the summer-house, with its blue-black skylight. There was nothing new; between the indelible memory of the crime and the greatness of God there was nothing but a futile suppliant.

That year, when the anniversary of the error returned, it seemed to him that people would be able, henceforth as they went by, to read on his face as on a signboard his misery and dread.

His age was that at which his father had destroyed the life only lent to him, and thus brought future punishment on all his family. It was even on a night as stormy as that other when the ageing son climbed the

stone steps of the neglected building, and went heavily into the green room.

A sudden gust of wind banged the door behind him. He tried to open it again, and failed. The driving force of the gale had been such that the door of disjointed boards had strained the old uneven frame into which it fitted, while the bolt of the lock had bent and wedged itself into projecting wood.

When he knew himself imprisoned there until the morning, he sat down. He was not afraid to remain all night in the funereal place. He was afraid of nothing, save of the Lord's purposes concerning him, —and he began to think of his only thought.

A great weariness crumbled and destroyed his ideas, and he went to sleep. Waking, he remembered that he had just struggled and groaned. He opened his eyes, and saw a hideous green figure, that hovered in front of him. The spectre threw itself upon the man, and drove its finger-nail into his temples. The pastor tried to breathe out a moan, and fell in a heap. At that moment the hurricane hurled itself more fiercely than ever on the old summer-house, and a worm-eaten rafter gave way. The roof fell in, and the wild and streaming wind of the night rushed into the green room, where the pastor lay like one of those sculptured figures which here and there in the course of centuries have begun their eternal slumber upon the tombstones.

In the morning, when his sons had found him and carried him to his bed, he struggled slightly, his eyelids fluttered, and he said, "The Green Spectre!"

The two sons, standing and rigid, had that in their

eyes which trembled like the flames of funeral tapers. The doctor—he who had come there a generation before—bent over the dying man. He heard the murmur, and he too trembled. But after a minute he said, "He will not die, *this time.*"

In deep thought the physician withdrew; he sought and enquired. At the end of the day he came and sat down by the bed where the pastor lay paralysed with weakness, but his eyes open.

"It's the green," said the doctor.

He explained that the room in the summer-house was poisonous, by reason of the green dust which had gathered upon the tattered decorations. That dust, a residuum of former paint, was a highly separated sediment from Scheele's green. It is alleged that prolonged stay in places where fine particles of this pigment are found in suspension provokes frightful hallucinations. And it is admitted that these illusions, in the case of sensitive people and those weakened by old age or some other cause, may give rise to terrible organic disorders. And——

He was continuing, when a harsh cry broke off his words. Half risen in bed, the sick man stared at him with an unutterable look of eager rapture, and stammered:

"Then my father did not kill himself?"

He burst into laughter of strange sound, laughter come to life again after so many years, and cried, "He did not kill himself! Then I am innocent! I am innocent!"

THE OTHERS

YES, I was born at St. Vincent," said the general to the surgeon-major who was accompanying him back to brigade headquarters; "I've got a house down there waiting for me, and some day I shall go back, to peter out there as obscurely as I was born."

"Oh!" said the gold-laced surgeon deferentially, and it seemed proper that he should add, "How long has your absence been, General?"

"Fifty years!" He laughed at the surprise which the huge figure provoked; and the same night, as he went to bed, he saw again the major's astonished face when he had spoken to him of a fifty years' separation. Then suddenly, with a sort of faintness—age, perhaps, or a slight fever—he saw it all more clearly, and started with surprise at that half-century.

He wondered why he had never gone back down there, found no possible reason, and went to sleep that night more uneasy than before about the great concerns of life.

According as the age of retirement drew more distinctly near him, he kept saying, "I must go down there first." The idea took such root in his head that one day he was impelled to set off.

When the train was under way, the idea quite dazzled him that he had at last acted on this astounding resolve to go back for a day to the place whence he

had come. Then he felt a pang of new anxiety—the apprehension that he was sacrificing something.

He shut his eyes and tried to picture the shapes and the faces of the houses. He thought, "All must be changed; it is so long ago!"

When the name of St. Vincent was shouted on the platform, towards half-past four of a sunny day, it roused him from his sleepiness and touched his heart, and he frowned slightly. He got up with the same composed heroic excitement that the eve of battle had been wont to bring him, and descended from the carriage.

Certainly the humble station, though become poor in comparison with important neighbours, and regularly overlooked by the expresses, was similar to what it always was, and he knew it again.

He went along the path that followed the palings, turned into the Avenue des Peupliers, and looked ahead. "Ah!" he said.

At a hundred paces forward on the road, to right and left beyond the bridge, he found the village again exactly as in the days when he played under those poplars. It was the same picture of fields enclosed by tall trees, of black windows framed in white, of meadows and foliage; so much the same, in truth, that he no longer saw clearly how *he* stood in the matter. And the breeze that met him, too, had not ceased to be the same.

The old man walked with a brisker step along the sunlit avenue, to meet the breeze and the village, a village so pretty that childishly he looked on it as on a picture.

When he reached the first houses—the farms that expanded across the clover fields to the mill, the saw-mill, with its perfume of a forest in quintessence—he declared decidedly that the village had remained quite as it was before his long exile.

A vague delight, courage and hope, awoke within him, thus to see all his memories coming to life. He met himself again, as one discovers a treasure, when he espied, on the border of the main street, the sign of the inn, no rustier to-day than of yore. He even recognised what he had forgotten.

The old officer, who had never felt himself brave except when facing enemy bayonets and guns, plucked up courage in the matter of the undefined ambushes of fate. Time was not so terrible as all that, since it let him come back, and gave him back at once the past as he had left it. Fate had *not* got all those frightful and irrevocable changes that people made out. There were places which remained peaceful always, as if they were Paradise. In its corner of the world, St. Vincent was too simple to forget its own renewal, too little to grow bigger.

On the second side of the square into which the man was proceeding, he read the words "Railway Goods Traffic." He remembered that it used to be "Imperial Post." It was a very trivial and permissible alteration, and it made him smile.

On the waste land which goes from the circle of lime-trees as far as the buttressed walls of the convent, there were heaped stones, planks, and a fragment of roofing, scaly with slates. He had always seen it in that state. But—yes—but formerly there was mate-

rial there for a house they were going to build. And now that house was in ruins. But it had quite the same appearance, and he recognised it.

But now, the man who had come back blinked his eyes. On the threshold of the shop which stood at the corner of the path leading to the sandpits, he discerned a feminine and monumental outline.

"Hullo! Madame Chabot,—or rather some one of her family."

He recalled the uncouth goodwife of former times who used to obstruct her doorway with her circular lines. Obesity was traditional in her family.

He compared dates and counted the years. Then he stood still in the middle of the street with a slight shudder. That woman *could not be even the daughter of the other* whom he used to see there, and she made one think of several graves. That impression scared him like the beginning of a nightmare.

What? There's that robber, Tripalet, his face smudged with alcoholic colours, his nose like an old cork, gesticulating at the door of the tavern! But no! He gave up gesticulating long since. It was—yes, it was his grandson, unconsciously imitating the ancestral puppet.

As soon as he accosted one of those now living there, there where he had learned to live, he had to do with a remote descendant, with a stranger, who moved in the gap left by the other, and smiled in his place.

Any people of his time? There were none left. His informant made a momentary sign of hope. Yet no—the decrepit invalid whose mouth was as empty as

his eyelids, and who sat outside his house and gossiped, his cotton cap flashing in the sunshine—he was not a village ancient; he had come from elsewhere. No one had escaped, no one; and worse than that, for since the passing of those with whom he had mingled, an unknown generation had ceased to be.

Ah, the houses had not changed, and the stones had remained in their places. Good! But places and things are chilling, and the village was only a cemetery that had not grown bigger. To say truth, there had been a huge massacre of living men, more obvious than elsewhere in this stagnant place, where one met history again and the details of dramas on the faces of the heirs, where melancholy resemblances to features and names told all there was to tell, where marks of mourning seemed written even on the immutability of the house-fronts, on the signboards as in the epitaphs!

The old man, who had smiled when he came, shook himself, growled, and lamented. He perceived that the village rejected him more surely than any other place in the world. Was he not a belated and inconsistent survival, a residue of night in a new day? Instinctively he retreated into an alley as into a hole.

Close to his ear he heard a strange harsh cry. Trembling, he looked up. It was *he,* the parrot he had known before, exactly on the same spot, on the other side of the spent half-century; and it was just the same cry. But the bird was only a thing, its cry only a blind and deaf noise. The caged survival of the little green freak was worth no more to the heart of the man than was the eternity of the wind or the

springtime or the sun, things which appear to live though they are in reality dead.

Still, he went on as far as his house. Anthony Tardieu's grand-niece opened the door and stood aside, her mouth squared and her arms dangling, nor suspected that here was the legendary master whom the family had only known for so many years by the money he sent.

He said, in an undertone and quickly, "It's me!"

She did not understand, but let him pass. He mounted the stairs, crossed the landing, and entered the drawing-room.

On the wall stood the portrait of a young fair man, in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant. This portrait had been painted several months before the accidental death of the sub-lieutenant, who was the father of the general.

The old man, enshrouded and buried in an armchair, lifted his eyes to the picture, and looked at the youth with a gaping look that was full of things impossible to express or to confess.

Little Martha Tardieu, who had come up on the visitor's heels, saw his clenched hands and wrinkled forehead—shipwrecked at the foot of the beautiful image, an image as unchanging, serene, and infinitely dead as a crucifix.

BOOK II

THE MADNESS OF LOVE

THE FUNERAL MARCH

AS she went along the urban quarter into where the wet fog was filtering she wanted to cry. All the same, she made haste, and skipped from one stone to another, along the pallid glitter of the pavement.

From a distance, the slim outline looked smart, and even fashionable. Her ankles, delicate as stalks, were placed in little polished shoes with well-squared heels; her dress went straight as a die up to her chin; and her hat, shaped like a candle extinguisher, quite poorly extinguished a lock of fair hair on her neck.

When near, the girl was no more than pretty. Her skirt was too meagre, her hat quite eaten up with pin-holes, her corsage of stuff so thin that any one could have seen her heart-beats.

Although her haste left her little time for thought, she felt desperately sad. Everything made her want to cry—her dull life, so young yet already futureless; the hard work, and the impossibility of flirtation; the house where she lived—the most unfriendly of all houses; the only room, and its eternal accompanists—father chasing mother round the stove and dragging a chair; the smell of greasy crockery, which sickened you after dinner, and the smell of cooking, which sickened you before; the dirty mirror, that had to be cleaned every morning; and on the landing, the untidy and beastly neighbour who posted himself by the tap,

and as soon as she appeared with her jug showed the lewd eyes and greasy smile of his moonstruck face.

Added to all this, there was the grief of this morning, which was gloomy as a night; the infinite monotony of the running gutter, cold as a river; all this autumnal, infectious sickliness, and above all, the rough and wilful gusts of rain that began to make her dress look stained and ridiculous.

There was no one in the world to whom gaiety was more forbidden.

No one? Yes, there was some one. Just at that moment his stooping figure was emerging from the entry to some works. He was just the same age as herself, and he was a prisoner in a forge, as she was in a dressmaker's workroom.

To right and to left he turned his bluish face, one that would have been very pleasant had it been less thin and reduced. He sniffed at the blast, and then let it take him away along the livid, gleaming street. One before the other he put down his huge iron-bound boots, wavered slightly in the wind, and thought about nothing—for fear of thinking about himself and what it was he was doing here on earth.

Now, the young man whom the squalls handled as roughly as the world did, and the girl bereft of smiles by the bad weather that also punished her poor dress—these two were going towards each other.

They had met twice, by chance; and this time, which was the hour when the workshops close at midday, they tried to meet (by chance) a third time, knowing nothing of each other nor having spoken.

It happened that they really approached each other,

and that she turned up an alley just when he entered it at the other end; so that she appeared suddenly before him, like a fairy.

He stopped dead, pricking up from his massive boots, and his back and shoulders trembling. The eyes in his earnest face opened wide, with a look of being rewarded.

She also stopped, and timidly they put their hands out to each other, like two beggars. Then each pressed the fingers of the other, more by way of clinging to each other than of saying good-day—for one does not always know how to begin at the beginning.

One moment they stood still, seriously considering which way they should go together. Bravely against the wind they set off, he with a red nose and she with pink eyes, and between them their two hands, making one only, each nursing the other.

She was the first to speak—"I've got till one o'clock; and you?"

"I, too," he replied; "shan't we lunch together now, don't you think?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, enraptured of the plan.

They both laughed—hesitatingly at first, as though they were attempting it. When it ended, their faces remained lighted up.

"Look," he said, "it hardly rains now!"

"What luck!" She clapped her hands. All the same, the rain had not ceased to fall on the bare background of the avenue.

"Now that it's fine, let's sit down a minute."

"Wait!" He stopped her with a gesture, and pull-

ing a newspaper from his pocket, he unfolded it upon the damp seat.

"Ah," she said, moved to tears by the courtesy, "how kind you are!"

She sat down, and looked at him so grandly that she seemed to be enthroned. He placed himself beside her. She tossed her head—"Papa would beat me if he knew where I was!"

"For my part," he replied, "it's my mother!"

The picture of the dangers defied made them merry, and they smiled, being too near each other to dare to laugh.

But when a gust of wind shook the plane-tree above them and gave them quite a shower-bath, they were obliged to laugh as they shook themselves.

Everything was growing darker. Mournful black clouds ever more and more begloomed the sky and submerged the earth.

"Look how pretty it is," she said.

She pointed out how the house-fronts shone with water, the polished roofs, the dark slabs of the foot-path, the glistening gutters.

"Yes," he stammered, "yes." Admiringly he added, "We've still got half an hour."

She wanted to walk a little. He agreed that it would certainly be still better. They got up and steered straight ahead. When people walk together they come magically near. Every minute their loneliness was enriched.

They passed in front of a ground-floor window that was half-open. Through the aperture they saw a shabby room—dirty, sinister, bare, and breathing

forth dampness. But they thought with a quiver of the room *they* might have. Then they thought still of that heavenly room as they brushed past another window, of which the shutters were closed.

In that moment they had together shut their eyes, both of them blind, and guided by each other.

They walked and walked. The houses grew fewer, and then the passers-by. The big avenue became a main road. They breathed the free air, full-lunged. A trail of smoke emitted by the works, stranded yonder towards the horizon, brought them a smell of damp earth. They inhaled this scent of the country, this holiday perfume.

"Just now the clouds were dirty, and now they are pearly grey," said one of their little voices.

After they had walked still more, suddenly there rose like an apparition on the side of the road a great white wall. Above the wall arose cypress trees, new-looking.

Hand in hand, they admired the foliage, reached the gates, and entered the main drive.

"It's a cemetery," she said.

"Yes; isn't it pretty!" he replied, with an air of convincement.

They travelled one drive, then another, and sat down on a bench, so affected by the rich splendour of the grounds that their hands forgot their clasp.

"Look, look!" A procession turned the corner and went by. The hearse was covered with a white cloth. Their hands sought and seized each other again, and by reason of that wonder-working clasp they imagined another procession, a pretty one, a momentous and

trembling procession, and one which *they* should lead —she, wedded, and he the married also.

It was so natural, so right, to replace the passing procession by the one which should be, that they had no need to speak of the dream ere they could share it and believe in it. When they got up to go, the first steps they took, side by side, were slow as in the nuptial aisle.

With beaming faces they left the cemetery and followed the white wall.

On a milestone hard by a man was seated before an organ, and they drew near as he played.

It was the great funeral march, the most heart-rending *De Profundis* that earthly sorrow has chanced to utter, a lamentation so immense and sinister that it even mingles the living with the dead and falls on our faces like an ice-cold mask.

The couple stopped, enchanted, and looked at each other festively. "How nice music is!" she whispered between her little teeth, and all attention.

"Come," he murmured at last.

They went away with a lightsome and joyous step, keeping merry time with the most hopeless of human music, smiling, chirping, finding good to say of what was ugly—unconscious of all their childish lips were saying, unconscious of all their warm hearts were creating.

THE WAY THEY WENT

ON the crest of the long round hill that dominated the village there was only one house.

It was placed just in the middle of the road that skirted the summit, so that when one had followed the road so far, he was obliged either to go back or enter the house.

This anomaly, a house completely obstructing a parish road (which went on again afterwards), was not considered important in the sluggish district of Ste Patenne. Besides, this bordering by-road was almost as deserted between morning and night as between night and morning.

In the scanty compass of this house, whose position gave it the same prominence in the place as the venerable nose of its church does to a city's outline, a couple lived. They were reserved and silent folk, who worked all day in the town, and had hardly enough leisure to sit in the tiny blossoming enclosure that embellished the house like a drawing-room.

This husband and this wife had not been cast in the same mould, not by much. He had a pointed nose between his greenish eyes, a receding chin, hemp-coloured hair, and a firm and rosy skin. She, of a nimble insignificance which contrasted with the loose bulk of her man, was adorned with a dull complexion and a head of the finest hair, black and silky. In short,

they were Day and Night from the head to the feet. But these details matter little. What specially marked them out was that they lived as though fastened together. One never saw them apart. As soon as they were a little separated, inevitably they looked at each other. They laughed or smiled at the same time, not in order to be alike, but because they were actually alike; and their eyes, which were as dissimilar as one can describe, had a look so similar that it was a miracle of a look.

These people liked each other too much for the taste of public opinion. Although they were born of the countryside, and both their surname and their Christian names abounded through the district, they had become strangers, thanks to their self-preference and consecration to each other. This attitude had naturally given displeasure, like all that which is exaggerated. Then it had come to be accepted, because they were obliging, and also because one was forced to accept it, and above all because one knew well that it would not go on always.

From their house, which was brown as an old chest, they set off every morning for Tholozan, a league and a half away. In the main street of the town they parted with a sort of careful awkwardness—they had been noticed—as though it were always the first time. In front of the Manoury shops he left his wife. At six in the evening he picked her up again there, in the shadow of the commercial porch, like a watchful mendicant, and shivering at his absence.

The village people watched them return every evening. In winter you could only see the dance of their

lantern, as little as a real star. In summer they outlined themselves in slender silhouettes above the dark cloud of the hill, against the sunset. They took each other's arm, and even the hand. They advanced with a solemn step, as though they were returning from the end of the world, and they always looked as though they brought big news.

"There they are!" growled Gaspard.

"How they stick to each other!" said La Miette.

"Yes," assented the aged Rémy woman. On great occasions she was still able to let that big word pass her white lips and bony gums: "yes."

"Ah!" murmured Mademoiselle Tindare, who by the fact of her age would have been a great-grandmother if ever she had been a wife.

The Gibiers' son, that bag of vices, that dirty good-for-nothing, opened his mouth wide, but could not find to throw out of it any of those rude remarks in which he was neither poor nor frugal! Assuredly, one could not shout all he would like to in the presence of people so madly blended in the purple scene of sunset. One could not.

Thus it was that they set off and returned each day, above the village and its dwellers. Thus it was that they went away that day—that day of the fire.

It broke out, terribly, at ten in the forenoon. Apparently it originated with a grindstone, from which the wind scattered some glowing spray on the wooden house.

However that may be, the house was consumed so completely and so quickly that nothing was left of what it had held. Buckets of water only cooled the

ends of charred beams among the crashing framework. On either side of the road they drew back the poor heap of rubbish; and alone among the ashes the skeleton of an iron bedstead had human shape.

The most surprising thing was that no one, during the fire, went to Tholozan to tell the inhabitants of the destroyed dwelling, and that no one went afterwards.

"They'll know soon enough," hazarded an old wife.

"Yes," replied Mother Rémy, applying once more the monotonous cry that was choked with tremendous truth and greedy of it.

When the evening fell that would bring the victims back, a certain excitement prevailed in the village. Faces appeared in the dark doorways, drawn by curiosity and fear, and then gathered in the market-place, though never did a messenger break away from the darkling group. But eyes looked up towards heaven and the top of the hill, like those of night-imprisoned crowds who came together to await a meteor.

Gaspard growled very quietly, "There they are!"

Two women were so distracted that they exclaimed together, "It's impossible!"

Afar on the reddening heights they made their twin appearance. One saw at once that they knew nothing of the disaster, for they were making their way towards the yawning place, the site of their house, with steps as tranquil as ever.

The darkened watchers down below grew more agitated. The two condemned, going to meet the punishment that misfortune had prepared for them, were talking to each other, and although quite near they

saw nothing yet, so much were they engrossed with themselves and their solitude.

They drew nearer and nearer. And now they have raised their heads and looked before them.

But neither at that moment did they see anything. No doubt they were thinking of each other as deeply as if they were talking face to face. They were smiling exactly the same smile. Did one see or did one guess that smile, that poor and melancholy aureole which lends added beauty to human faces? Visible or invisible, one believed it was there.

Some moments passed, and the man and the woman went on between the two heaps of ruins without noticing them; and they continued to walk, incapable of seeing what lay at their feet, and disappeared on the other side in the glory of the sun.

The faces of the watchers gazed at each other in the twilight—stupefied but fascinated.

La Miette was full of words far too simple for her to say; she could only move her lips. But the old Rémy woman made her a gentle gesture that meant "yes."

"Yes, yes," the others thought and dreamed; "yes, evidently. They are somewhere else, so they haven't seen anything. Yes; their road is wide open and they are following it, that's all. Yes, it is quite natural they didn't stop at their house, seeing it's no longer there."

A TALE OF FOUR

EVERY evening, at this corner of the two avenues and not far from the lighted gas-lamp, a young man took his stand. He was dismal, narrow, and dark, like a gas-lamp gone out.

To the same place he came every day at the same hour, and walked about for a long time, venturing glances to this side and that, looking everywhere for some one, staring at the passers-by, the trees, and the walls. A tawny overcoat, turning green, hung from his meagre shoulders as if they had been bat-pegs. By the light that fell on him from the street-lamp one glimpsed a slight and mournful beard on a protuberance of yellow cheek, or a corner of his forehead to which the light from some office window had managed to lend the pallor of paper. Even when the evening was fine and the air kindly, this emaciated wayfarer, so timidly beached on the pavement's edge amid the flood of the others, seemed like one shipwrecked, questioning the whole world.

But at a certain moment one noticed that he straightened himself, so that a gleam of light illumined him.

For a woman was walking delicately towards him on the pavement. She stopped under his nose, like a rose, showed him her shining teeth, shook her neck in her feathery collarette, and carolled him a little greeting. For his part, he began to smile, an unending

smile, big and leisurely. He poised above her, and trembled like a drowning man who is pulled out and set upright. She was radiant, perfect, pretty, although poorly dressed. There was a remarkable contrast between the richness of what she was and the poverty of what she wore. She seemed as if disguised, like a fairy of the stage. Her eyes and her lips made one think of lost jewels.

The man, his petition granted by this arrival, recovered himself at last from his rapture, and learning again to speak, some words returned to his lips. He took the young girl's arm, and they moved away with her delicacy and his attenuation—so slender both that one would say from a distance they were a single being torn in two.

Now, at a hundred paces from there, also motionless in the crowd's tangled ebb and flow, a young woman used to wait for some one every evening.

She always arrived too early, for at first she sought nothing, and began by slowly circling the newspaper Kiosk.

She wore a coat and skirt of dull grey, a hue of nameless mourning. Her only adornment was a blue ribbon in her hat. In the sudden harsh light of the tram-car that glided over the roadway she showed an irregular and faded face, pierced by eyes too little, deformed by a nose too long, cloven by a mouth too wide. Sometimes she yawned, when her long teeth made her look ferocious, and then the dull eyelids fluttered, and watered in weariness. Now and again she would become suddenly alert and erect, as though wakened. With effort renewed, she then walked

more briskly, swinging her right hand, tightly closed on the bony handle of her umbrella, and her left hand, which took the impress of her hand-bag cords.

Behold her then suddenly transformed! Her eyes began to light up her face like stars, her lips to move in silent speech, like those that pray.

For yonder a man was turning into the square. He crossed it and drew near leisurely. He was a splendid fellow, broad, of strong shoulders, radiant cheeks, and big fair moustaches, solid and golden.

He came up to her and nodded. She did not move at first, as though bewildered, but her hands trembled like the tips of little wings. He said nothing; she could not. In ultimate decision she put out her hand and grasped his arm, cautiously, because of his strength and immense fascination. They went away. She pressed close to him with all her might, but feebly, as a grandmother might. He walked with such strong assurance that he did not seem to notice her.

Such was the double meeting of which I was witness every evening, being similarly occupied in the neighbourhood at the time when the two couples formed themselves, and were dissolved and submerged in the multitude.

As in a sort of expiring novelette, I used every time to read the continuation of these two love-stories on the faces—languid and then triumphant—of the man in the fawn overcoat and the woman with the blue ribbon.

Both had found a companion to illumine their lives, a face for their own transfiguration. Ugly and unsightly as both were, they had succeeded in securing

from among the host of men and women some one who was worth more than themselves.

And I used to say to myself that these two idylls would not last, that they were too fragile and, as it were, unhealthy, for the reason that, in each of these couples, the one had too great a need of the other, that their destitution and their relief were too great.

It could only have been for poor and fleeting reasons—a bit of compassion or of chance—that fate had lent to the miserable work-girl the man with the beautiful moustaches, and to the blossoming girl the unfortunate spectre whose company almost made her ridiculous.

Doubtless the fine gentleman deemed it convenient and profitable for the moment to be adored by a fervent and slavish heart; but he was watched for by the beautiful and generous women of the world. Doubtless the shop-girl, so young yet and so innocent, was yielding to a first blind desire for love; but she was fated to prefer, sooner or later, any one at all rather than him who nightly begged for her at the corner of the street.

Such were the thoughts that the spectacle of the regular rendezvous suggested to my observant mind.

Well, I was right. The matter was badly arranged —as is usual in life, where everything happens as piteously as possible; or as in worthless novelettes, which allow you from the beginning to guess the end.

The end? It was not long in coming. One day, after a short absence from town, I was pacing the usual sidewalk, much later than usual. The fawn overcoat was waiting, alone. At the other place the

woman topped by a scrap of blue ribbon was also abandoned to herself.

The next day also I crossed the path of these two solitudes. He, his eyes wandering over the swarming humanity, looked without end for her who did not come. Among strangers living and hurrying, with his shiny overcoat and the shoulders that drooped in the form of an extinguisher, he seemed the dismal statue of mediocrity punished.

She—her looks no longer rose so high as faces, but trailed on the ground in complete subjection and watched the running gutter—a narrow river of mud, as mournful as the bigger ones, but not big enough to drown one's self. Reducing my pace, I made out the profile of her expressionless and ruined face, her bosom flat as a slab, her great mouth, neglected and fruitless.

Instinctively I stopped midway between the two unknown with the visible wounds.

Too much left behind to be able to give up waiting, yet no longer knowing how to wait, each of them broke away a little from the place of rendezvous.

Backwards she moved from the shadow of the Kiosk, then returned, and went slowly down the avenue. He went up it, mechanically, after retiring obliquely from the edge of the sidewalk.

With dispiriting slowness they went towards each other.

It seemed curious to me then, but affecting, that fate should thus be driving these two halves of love towards the same point. On the dark stones of the half-deserted footpath they were fated to meet. Who

could say if these two mourners, these strangers of bleeding heart, would not find relief in recognition? Who knew if these two survivors would not replace by each other the two who had disappeared, the two of old elected in a flash of too beautiful folly?

They arrived in front of each other, exactly. They lifted their eyes; they saw each other; and quickly they turned away their heads.

Ah, they did in fact recognise each other! But also they recognised their pitiful unpardonable ugliness, their crime of ugliness. And I shall never forget the look exchanged, a look that was full of savage hatred and of a dreadful curse!

THE FAIRY TALE

IS it true that there are people who go to sleep for twenty years and wake up suddenly with a white beard?" asked Eugene, as he left off reading and turned towards his parents his dunce's face, with its tiny forehead.

"No!" growled Paul.

"Children *are* stupid!" sighed Caroline maternally, as she quickened her sewing.

Into the crowds of fairies and wizards that swarmed over the pages of his book the family heir again plunged his knife-like profile; and while his pointed and shaggy head moved to and fro in enthralment, his father resumed the reading of his paper and his mother began again to hem the last edge of a duster, which as she stretched it out exhaled the linen-draper.

Five minutes later Papa, having absorbed the last item of news with his big myopic eyes, folded his paper and put it down, yawned, and in an effort to speak while yawning, whinnied the remark, "We, too, were stupid at that age."

"It's a fine long time since then," said Caroline, whose voice was expressionless, though she sewed with conviction. Some fifty years had tarnished her hair with grey and enshrouded her in fat. One could presage the total disablement of her old age. Yet

over her balloon-like face there floated a faint but perpetual smile.

Her husband, who resembled her as a brother might, admitted a series of black yawns into the pale and rounded mask of his face; and then, tearfully composed, listened to his son, who snored open-mouthed as he read, thanks to the prodigious growths which next year would see removed by operation. The child was prone in provocative absorption, and the noise that he made in turning the pages from time to time became intolerable.

"Go to bed!" said Papa suddenly. "It's past the time. Come—off you go!"

Torn from his book, the child raised a fearful and malevolent eye towards his progenitor, sniffed, and got up regretfully, mumbling between his teeth a rude remark, which, though he alone heard it, would enable him to boast about it next day at school.

With laggard feet he went to bid his parents goodnight. His face was thin and bloodless, suggesting a vegetable; his look was so meek that it made him squint. Behind his big pinafore, his loose-hanging jacket and dangling knickers, one divined a frail body, insufficiently fortified with cod liver oil.

Alone with his wife, Paul spoke of a new line of tramway. She appeared interested, receptive; and then met his move with a copious account of the disputes between the charwoman and an aggressive aunt, arrived from Poitou. Thereafter she embarked upon an account and vindication of her day's work. The man looked at his wife with stupid attention, yawning.

"Speaking of that," she said irrelevantly, "I found

this while looking inside the clock, between the base and the works. Some old stuff."

She fumbled in her bag and placed some folded papers on the table.

He bent over the slender relics and said, "What is it?"

"Some letters," said Caroline.

"Well, what letters?"

"Some letters we wrote to each other before we were married."

"Not really?" Surprised and amused, he extended a finger to touch the bits of paper, and his fleshy face drew quite near to them, in sniffing question. "Ah! And what's this on them? Ribbons?"

"Yes. There's one from me with a pink one and one from you with a blue one. You know we used to put ribbons on them."

"By Jove, that's true! Now I'd forgotten that ribbon trick."

"So had I, you may be sure," said Caroline, "but I remembered when I saw them."

"And what did we say in them?" asked the husband, his plump fingers going forth over the table to seize the flimsy paper jetsam.

"How should I know?" she replied.

He unfolded one of the letters, as awkwardly as if he were handling some delicate insect and trying to make it open its wings wide.

Something fell from it in flakes, and one of his eyes dilated—"What's that now?" He let loose a great laugh—"Rose leaves, my word! They're twenty-

six years old, no doubt about it. I sent you some rose leaves, that's all!"

Back into the envelope—equally withered—he put the petal scraps.

The woman had become soberly silent. Chance had turned her to-night towards the past, and she seemed willing to remember. And as the letter lay motionless and wordless in his hand, he drew it nearer his eyes, read the date in a whisper, and then, half aloud, the first words—"My adorable love!"

The man faltered over his letter of long ago as a child over the puzzle of the alphabet. He recognised nothing in it all. As he heard these *new* things, he rolled his round eyes in their bulging lids.

At the foot of the page he stopped to take breath; he prepared to speak, but could not, and coughed.

"And then?" she demanded.

He set himself anew to spell out and learn again his letter. As for her, she had pushed up quite near. The square of linen that busied her a moment ago slipped from her lap, and she did not pick it up. With hands and mouth half open, and the eyebrows contracted to the utmost on her soft white forehead, she listened; she listened hard.

Of a sudden the letter uttered two names, "Lolo and Liline."

"Lolo and Liline!" he tittered. "What's that?"

"It's us," she answered simply.

He continued his reading, but broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, full of quite obscure allusions—"We don't know the meaning——"

With that profoundness which the heart of woman

sometimes reveals she replied: "It's worse than that; we no longer know the meaning."

He threw on the table the letter that could not rise from the dead. Willy-nilly she reached out for her letter, her own, and read it aloud in her turn with strange attention.

The letter revealed her in melancholy mood. Affectionate fiancée as she was, on that far-off day she had written of solemn things, and besought her lover to cherish her closely, having that ultimate parting in mind which would come sooner or later.

At these words the big man jumped in his chair and growled, "Eh, what? Die? We, I?" He gestured dissent, with the desperation of one who cries from a shipwreck. "It's not true!" he said. An indefinable dread seemed really to waken him, at last to waken him. She—she was a little more heart-rent than he. They stared at each other then, and for the first time in so many years they found themselves truly face to face again; they recognised each other confusedly, as they were once upon a time, as they were in reality. A world of formless and voiceless thoughts stirred within them.

"We change and forget ourselves. Such is habit!" stammered one of the voices.

"Habit! I had no idea it could become so strong!"

As a sudden idea illuminated the woman, she panted, "Why, what the boy was saying from his fairy tale! There are people who go to sleep for twenty years, eh?"

But the man cried, already half emerged from the dream, "Nonsense! It's not the same thing!"

"Yes, it is! We go to sleep—we go to sleep side by side." She lowered her voice. "We go to sleep like that; by night at first, and then in the daytime."

Then she nodded her head, and after some moments longer, changed, hurt, and doleful, she added, "Ah, if we could wake up again!"

He had risen, pacified, relapsed into his perpetual calm. He was straightening the chairs. But he mumbled, "It would be too good."

She took the lamp to follow him into the bedroom, already docile as before, and even sleepy; but still a little dazzled by the things that are impossible—because they would be too good.

RESURRECTION

SO much this drawing-room resembled an ancient print, with its old-fashioned furniture, the knickknacks that breathed survival, its antique and insipid colours, that it made you look instinctively for its old frame.

In the middle of the mahogany table and of the room, on a square of canvas, stood a cylindrical lamp, whose cardboard shade cut into its cold and winterly gleams. This feeble light reached the monotonous face of the glass-shaded clock, the harsh green serge of the mantelpiece and its woolly fringe, the armchairs in red damask that stood in rows against the poppy-coloured wall paper. More weakly it touched the moss-green carpet, all quilted with textile flowers.

The old gentleman in the armchair said in a subdued voice to the old lady who watched him on the other side of the table, "What is there in the paper?"

"Wait," droned the old lady, "wait a minute."

They settled down, she to read, he to listen. With meticulous precaution he wrapped himself up in his soft and silent dressing-gown; and out of its formless folds he thrust a head so old that one could no longer guess whether he had formerly been soldier, *artiste,* or employee.

The old lady moved her chair, and her silk dress made a noise of dead leaves. Then she raised the

newspaper till it threw a pale reflection on her face—which also seemed to be drawn on delicate paper, and would change no more until the last tragic and prodigious change.

They were as well behaved as thoughtful children. Especially were they made up of tricks and habits that in a light and almost frivolous way had floated on from the shipwreck of their lives.

Though they performed this reading of the paper every evening, she from eight to nine, and he from nine to ten, they grasped no new things, for they could no longer learn. What they best understood were the accidents, those brief and dreadful dramas, too quickly told to make one cry, too many to be deeply pondered, which always have been and always will be.

She read: " 'They pulled him out of the ruins. His chest was crushed. The grief of the parents is indescribable.' "

"The unfortunate man!" he observed, with tranquillity, with ignorance; "how old was he?"

She sought carefully among the lines that danced a little: "It doesn't say. Ah, yes! Twenty. 'Jean Rimel, the victim, was twenty years old, and was engaged to be married.' "

"Twenty! Then that's exactly like Julien, eh?"

A silence followed, in which they called up, among the great multitude of dead that they comprised, the far-off young man, the friend of their youth.

"How long ago was that?" asked the old man, his forehead labouring in the quest.

"Julien? It's forty years since," she said.

"Ah!" he replied.

Again, nothing. Then the voice of the old lady, whose lips had been moving for a moment, arose tremblingly—"Julien! Julien!" she said.

The little old man jumped slightly, for she said that in a curious, unfamiliar tone. "Why do you call him?" he asked, dimly awakened from himself, surprised, and even uneasy.

She had laid the paper down on the table, put her pearly old hands, with their wrists like dry wood, on the top of it, and was looking in front of her. Her voice remained tranquil and colourless. But she said:

"Listen. I may as well confess it to you now—Julien—I loved him. And he loved me, too."

"What's that you say? You, he? And what about me?"

She was still looking into nothing, like a sleepwalker. "I loved you before, and after almost always. But once, it was he; a little before his death."

He sighed lightly. "Ah!" Reflecting, he gradually brought back from the disturbance of this unexpected news the face set eternally opposite his, the face he had so long and so closely seen that it was in fact the mirror of his own.

"It's no longer of importance!" one of them murmured at last.

"No," said the other.

All the same, she had an afterthought, and it escaped from her lips: "And you? Did you never have a mistress?"

At once, easily, he opened his old heart wide: "Yes," he said, "I've had one."

She shook her soft-featured head: "You, too! I should not have believed it."

They continued speaking of themselves, and sought unknown things, as one speaks of strangers.

"Then Julien and you—you had some meetings? Where were they?"

"I don't know."

"How many times?"

"Three times, or four—I only remember, just a little, the first. And she? Is she dead?"

"To be sure—a long time!"

"Was she beautiful?"

He closed his eyes, but opened them at once, as if he found it useless: "No doubt—I don't remember —but certainly she would be very beautiful. Since then I've only seen the same little portrait, always, and of course that portrait blotted *her* out, in the end."

"Yes, I know. *He* has disappeared like that, too." She added, "How I loved him! How I must have loved him!"

"We forget all that, don't we?"

"Yes; we only know it. And how long did it last?"

"From an autumn to a summer; six months. And you?"

"Not quite a month. He died almost at once."

"And afterwards? You didn't forget him all at once?"

"No, no. I remember that I remembered—yes, wait! I was even on the point of killing myself. It seems to me, at least—it's almost conjecture that I'm making——"

"And then—nothing?"

"No, nothing. We returned to each other."

"Naturally." The old lady seemed surprised to have only just now unveiled the secret. "How did it come about that I saw nothing, nor suspected anything? One *is* stupid, now!"

"No, not stupid. *I* saw nothing, either. One took care, you know. Do you remember when I told you I had to go to London?"

"You both went to London?"

"Not to London—to St. Germain."

"Story-teller!" she said, with menacing finger. "How I should have cried if I'd known!"

"And I—how I should have bawled, had I known!"

"Yes," she murmured, magnificently, "we should have been unjust and malicious."

They grew tired for a moment of saying nothing. Then he ventured: "It must be late?"

The clock marked only nine o'clock. The double confession had all at once hastened and aged the evening. They rose, and looked at each other, standing. It was then they realised that they were embarrassed in each other's presence. Nervously he asked, as he lowered his eyes, "We've done right, haven't we, to tell all that?"

"Yes, yes," she assented, "it's better."

They reached the bedroom. As she undressed she said, "So there have been for a long time these two secrets between us—we have deceived each other—so our life has been different from what we thought it was—it is a big change, deep down, you know."

They got into bed. In the twilight bestowed by the

little lamp in the middle of the room, they fell to thinking, trying to remember, trying to dream.

They did not sleep. And they were so used to each other, so similarly fashioned, that in the middle of the night they raised themselves together and called to each other at the same time in low voices, but as if they cried for help. They showed each other looks more animate, more profound, than before, with tears of resurrection in their eyes.

"It's too great a change, isn't it?" she stammered. "All that was half dead, half lost. Ah, we ought not to have told what we had done; we ought not to have *begun over again!*"

THE DREAM

LITTLE by little they became sundered. Why? For nothing. Because love does not endure. From continually agreeing, one ends by getting angry. A dispute arose, which was the final rupture.

"Good-bye!" cried Jeanne.

"Good evening!" grinned Gérard.

She went away, wrapped in her fichu, and with two stubborn tears. And the workman, as he leaned against the wall, followed her with his eyes, and an air of spiteful victory.

When evening came, no one awaited his coming out of the factory, and he gave a cheerful sigh. When, at the end of the long street, he entered the yard of Number 23, he rubbed his hands. He passed between the bony posts of the wooden porch, went along the short paved path that a paling and an old wall enclosed, and crossed the gloomy yard where the glass door is squeezed between two little shops, at the top of its three steps.

He went into the little room where they had so often hidden to say so many things, and looked at the great desert of it. He walked stumblingly among the obscurity in which they had so often submerged themselves.

"So much the better!" he repeated, twisting his fine

moustache with the big hand that the day's work had turned grey. "Ah, so much the better!"

All the same, he became irritable. He had nervous fits, and even bad tempers. He nearly strangled Bidon, for nothing at all, in the little pointed café contrived in the corner of the Rue des Turcs. He argued about politics, with violence and insincerity.

"What's the matter with Gérard?" they said.

His aunt Léa, who was *concierge* to No. 23 and who half opened the glass door now and then to look in on him, was alarmed by the public talk, and questioned him. But his hostile attitude frightened her.

He forsook the tavern, and began to spend as much time as possible in his half-widower's room; and there he applied his attention to the mournful gleam that came through the glass door. He seemed to be waiting.

He was waiting, in fact—for her. What could she be doing anywhere else? No, it was impossible that she would not come back—once, at least.

Everything lacked her; the furniture they had once bought together, the red and shining sideboard, the four bentwood chairs, the table, covered with oilcloth, all pointed to an empty place. So did the caged birds, so abandoned that they almost seemed to be children.

He set himself furiously to wait, with grasped forehead, not understanding the length of this absence, of the exile's endurance. He did not light the lamp in the evenings, but engulfed himself in the dark of the room.

One week, two weeks went by. Jeanne did not return from the unknown. He asked one and another

what had become of her, tried to find out, tried to provoke gossip with winks of his eye. They gave him a thousand contradictory details. In reality, they did not know.

So he ceased to speak of her to others. He preferred to talk to her directly, that is, to wait for her with meekness, and do nothing.

And one night, the last in February, when fixed in a corner as in a niche, he saw her appear, between eleven and midnight.

Lightly she pushed the door open and glided into the room. She was hardly visible, clad cloudily, and her face a pearl-grey. She seemed like evening in night.

She advanced to the middle of the room and hesitated there, irresolute. She was erect, but hazy, and he could not see her feet move.

She went and opened the lock-up drawer in the sideboard, where there were letters, and stooped over them; the papers moved. Then she turned round, took two steps, raised her head, and looked at the cage and the nest where the three fledglings were cuddling up—so recently imprisoned that their wings were still only little arms. She unhooked the cage and put it on the window-sill, so that she could see it better.

He held his breath, thrilled by the miraculous return. But little by little, jerkily, he straightened himself. With an abrupt effort he stood upright, and staggered towards the woman with hands outstretched. But his hands passed through the frail form. His voice did not reach the apparition. She heard no more than if she were an angel. She heeded him not, but

moved away, fled, vanished at his touch. She was alone and he was alone.

"Good God!"

Realising that he was dreaming while wide awake, he groaned in submission, and threw himself on a stool at the corner of the table, with his elbows on the cloth. He laid his face in his folded arms, and slept dreamless at last, with the sure tranquillity of the dead.

When he awoke, it was late in the forenoon, near midday, with dirty and rainy weather.

Yes, but she had come! He rubbed his eyes, and immediately he smiled.

The glass door moved ajar, and Léa revealed her rough-hewn face, like an old man's. Emerged from his torpor, he looked at her. "Jeannette came back last night," he said.

"No, my poor lad," exclaimed the *concierge,* "she didn't come, for I opened the door to no one all night!" The old lady raised her eyes and her arms by way of compassionate protest against the madness of her nephew, who saw people that were not there.

When she had gone, he looked this way and that, in stupefaction. He pondered the peremptory words of the *concierge.* Then with a sudden shock he recalled the apparition's inconsistency. No, Jeanne had not been! He had dreamed it!

He strode several paces in the room, poorly lighted by the dirty sky, and suddenly his eyes opened wide. "Ah!" he stammered.

The letter-drawer, usually shut, was open. The letters were scattered, and one on the edge was on the point of falling out. The bird-cage which had hung

on its nail the night before had been taken down, and now rested on the window-sill. And there, on the back of a chair, a ruffle of white feathers was garlanded! *Her* ruffle—lost since the separation, gone away with her!

And then—what is this again? He inhaled the lowly air of the room, and lo, it was slightly scented! Was it not the fragrance of the rose she wore? Yes, yes!

He lowered his eyes in agitation. On the floor he saw marks of footsteps, made by little shoes that had trodden the muddy street. He laughed and cried.

"She *did* come back! I *did* see her! We are going to live together again."

The man had had, in point of fact, an illusion. And yet the woman had really been back.

But it was not at the moment when he had thought he saw her. She had come back *afterwards,* through the rain of the forenoon, while blindly and deafly he slept. The vision was only an illusion; but that madness had justified itself, seeing that only a few hours later she had really come—to touch their things, to whisper to the letters, to see the bird-cage again, to sweeten the room like a posy of flowers, and to say that she would like to come back to life!

THE STRICKEN

WHEN the wealthy physician informed me—with or without considerateness; I don't remember—that I was vaguely consumptive, I replied, "Damn it!" in a pretty calm way; but I beg you to believe that I had to set my teeth so as not to make an ugly grimace.

But I am a man of decision. I knew what to do. Tormented as I might be, at bottom of my unlucky carcass, by pangs of pain and chronic fearfulness, I closed my business. I did not wait to inform those whom I liked or who like me—I owed myself henceforth to myself—and set off full steam ahead for a mountain sanatorium. In the afternoon of the second day a funicular railway conducted me to a pointed station that put a cap on to a pallid peak. Pallid myself, I got down, and entered the sanatorium as others enter—by dint of crime rather than misfortune—La Roquette.[1]

The make-up of the establishment was that of an hotel, and the visitors, as they gathered after meals in the great winter-gardens that trembled in an orchestral breeze, presented the appearance of harmless holiday travellers.

But that was worldly concealment. The house, as a matter of fact—with its spy-like attendants haunting the corridors, its heaps of spare spittoons in discreet

[1] A convict prison in Paris.—Tr.

corners, its acrid puffs from the crevices of rooms in process of disinfection, its dramatic circle of linoleum where the chief doctor's door attracted every morning processions of colourless spectres—was a hospital in good earnest. And each of those beings, although they largely imitated the free and easy ways of seaside bathers, was passionately occupied with the dark mystery of his lungs.

I established myself at the dining-table between a Russian and an Italian, facing a Syrian. From time to time we were swallowed up by the loud voice of the close-cropped German, or the bursting laughter of the American lady, who seemed to have been copied from a picture in some magazine. I accustomed myself to hearing our talk, which turned on heat and on cold, but especially on our own morning and evening temperature, and its flights round about the prophetic 37th degree. It turned on literature and art, but especially on diet; on famous personalities, but especially on Dr. Otto, our master, our nearest deity. Tried we never so hard to get away from ourselves, we tumbled back there.

At the end of the first fortnight I had gained more than two pounds in weight. This discovery composed me a little. I spread it about. Some people were envious, but laboriously succeeded in congratulating me; others pretended, with no skill, to believe me.

It was a brief respite. The following week I gained no weight, and there were vacant seats at the dinner-table. Where were Messieurs Schmidt, Lorenzaccio, and van der Bock? One dared not dwell too much on the disappearance of this one, who had gone back

cured to his corner of the globe, or of that one, who, on the other hand, had been buried. The month of May is the most trying of all.

And yet, in the middle of the hypocritical invalids that we were, there were eighteen divinely healthy beings who performed evolutions. These were the waitresses, or servants of the dinner-table. They were full-bloomed and charming, and their graces blended with their health as colours in light.

They circulated round the tables where two hundred patients squatted; they formed into files, converged as they went out with empty hands, and scattered symmetrically as they came in adorned with dishes. Their unison of movement gave them the air of a music-hall chorus.

I had never dared to cast eyes on these fresh-air roses, brief captives of that unwholesome hall where we all vegetated with our empty words and our unconfessable nightmares, when one of them took it into her head to smile at me. She was not quite one of them. She was their mistress, their superintendent, their Queen. Much more, she was the loveliest—a sort of Madonna become a woman, with an aureole become hair. She smiled at me twice. A single smile is a wayward thing; smiles only think of making up their minds at the second time.

So, without any sort of reflection, I was consoled—nay, rewarded!—for my distress and my loneliness, for the accumulation of haunting details, and even for the heavy toil that I should have to face, later, in order to live my life again!

I confess to you, my friends—I have only told you

this story so that I might be able to confess—that I turned towards this young woman completely thrilled.

I met her as the chance came, sometimes in a corridor, sometimes in the hall, or outside, on the threshold of the kitchens, or near a window, attentive to some letter that brightened her cheek.

I spoke to her. Miraculously she vouchsafed an answer. Through the medium of her artless retorts, by the touch of her gentle derision and the smile that clung to her, I discovered that she was not indifferent.

Naturally, I was not just then in a reasoning condition. The idea did not occur to me that some material bait was doubtless tempting her to turn her little shell-shaped ear obligingly towards the expression of my emotion, and her eyes to that wonder which filled my face as with light when she passed. For, to these pure little souls gathered in from the mountain hamlets, every patient is a millionaire.

I allowed myself to go and to take—but suddenly I had an awakening!

I made a conscientious inquiry. I remember it well—it was in my bedroom, at the end of a day when a chill had thrown me back upon recurrent and keener anguish.

Standing among my instruments, my inhaler, my thermometer, my spirit lamp, standing near my bed,—the terrible bed of sweat and fever, the sleepless bed—I saw in the glass my hawk-like, fleshless face, my evil leanness, my poisoned mouth. And I saw that my action was wrong.

Ah, how infamous, to touch with my desire the being who had brought there the wonderful virginity

of healthfulness, who made a spot of purity among us, and to threaten with an idyll that angel of ignorance!

How evil to make her forget, with the jar of a bad dream, the corner of the earth whence she had come as from a garden, where doubtless there was some one betrothed to her, as rich in health as she and as worthy!

I perceived the crime. Recoiling, as people not too stupid can, I replaced my nervous passion with a sort of boundless tenderness, an infinite hunger of happiness for her.

Henceforth I approached her with more of deference and respect. Hardly daring to murmur the words with my infected lips, looking at her feet when she answered me, I asked her about her family. I was touched by the story she told me of her grandmother, and no less moved by the troubles of her sister Germaine.

Now, two weeks after this victory—rather a noble one, don't you think?—which had led me to love her for her own sake, I came on her in the glass corridor, to which the outer snows gave a sharp and marble-like whiteness.

Her beautiful form was drawn upon the background of far-off mountains. Her face, with its cheeks like pink roses and its mouth like a red rose, was more than ever that of a pictured saint come down from its frame. Seeing her neck, and then the beginning of her shoulders, one thought of a Venus de Milo with arms, but, it is true, with a corsage.

I stammered a few words to her, commiserating her that she had to live in the middle of illness.

"But I, too, I am very ill," she said.

She smiled at me her incomparable smile.

"Dr. Otto found a place for me here the first time I spat blood."

Ah! I had started back, hardly stifling a hoarse cry. I looked at her. I looked at her—in spite of myself, my dear friends—with a joy voluptuous and fierce. I stooped to the lips that were no longer inviolable. Trembling, I touched with my eyes her condemned body, the hell that she was, and the heaven.

THE FIRST LOVE

WHEN we received the invitation card announcing the approaching marriage of Dr. Nixter and Angette de la Vallée, we all felt heavy at heart. It was worst for those among us who were intimate friends, and must be present at the ceremony.

Both were young and good-looking. You could see that they worshipped each other; but especially could you see that she was infinitely fragile, and would soon die.

Under her falling veil the young girl seemed to be quite upright, though so slight, and leaning like a jet of water. Her face? Exquisite as it was, it was masked by a little too much pallor, hardened by a slight excess of spareness, and the smile that floated before her was fearfully, divinely faint.

All that snowiness in which she was made and clad —that perfect whiteness hardly stained by a weak flush in the cheeks that each delicate approach of a cough brought—was already unnatural; and really, as soon as she ceased to move, one almost felt afraid, and dared no longer think of her.

How she leaned on him, and how serious he was, and immovable! Jean Nixter offered one of the finest types of mankind that could rise in the dreams or brighten the eyes of lover or painter. His will and his triumphant vitality expanded in his great height,

his breadth of shoulder, the splendid regularity of his features—and still more in the trembling emotion which inclined him towards her.

Yes, yes; looking at that couple, I understood at last that gentleness and tenderness have something masculine in them.

They had always, from the beginning, worshipped each other. As children they had met each other during several holidays on the beach at St. Just, where there is a peaked fountain, a seat, a tree, and sometimes a passer-by. There they smiled at each other before they knew who they were, sought and found each other often, and then one evening kissed each other before they knew what a kiss was.

In the days which followed, thanks to family proximity in town and country, they did not leave each other again. Jean confided to Angette (at the same time as to himself) his ambitions in music, and glory, and great masterpieces, and Angette learned from him all that she could look forward to in life.

At the time when the young girl was stricken by disease, at first gently and almost caressingly, and then when her health became definitely impaired, she was no orphan; and yet it was to him alone that she faded, for him alone that she suffered.

Since she got no better, he decided to change his plans for the future. He would not be a musician, but a doctor, and instead of writing a masterpiece he would cure her.

In that faith he laboured, fell furiously upon costly books, and learned them as if they had been unending prayers. As soon as he had got his physician's de-

gree, he sought to marry her. Angette had tried at first not to wish it, knowing that she was condemned, but she was so loving and so weak that she could not long refuse.

He had said, to parents mournfully irresolute and to friends uneasily reticent, "I shall save her!"

So now, in the little grey room at the town-hall they both were passing, in such union, and so wrapped up in each other, that when their looks turned upon strangers they seemed to be blind.

Those strangers were the relations, and we their friends. I remember that little Lambert was there, as well.

Why had *he* had the idea of coming? A relation? No! A friend? Well—none of us was ignorant that he had asked for Angette's hand two years before. He had been, and with reason, summarily bowed out. After which, marriage with an heiress had made a fashionable and triumphant doctor of him, a savant of adoration in drawing-rooms.

Why was he there? Was it chivalrous courtesy or spiteful cynicism? Who knows! Only is it certain that his artistic face, his subduing chin, and the glittering black locks that had won for him so many patients of importance were resplendent against the dismal wall of the registrar's room.

However, neither Jean nor Angette noticed him. I have explained the reason to you.

From that moment Jean Nixter devoted himself with scrupulous stubbornness to the healing of his wife. One cannot describe the eagerness and patience, the heroic ability he brought to bear, the sublime lies

he invented, his desperate effort to solve mysteries and to see in the dark!

And what happened? At first she got worse. Then she ceased to die. Then, very gently, very childishly, she began again to live.

They say that he transfused his blood into her. I can believe it, for I met him several times with an extraordinary look, pale, and his movements almost paralytic. They say, too, that he hynotised her, and controlled her will. I can believe that, too, for it is certain that he tried everything.

However it was, he saved her.

And what affection during that convalescence so slow and so minute, when she was as completely bound to her splendid friend as if he had been the mother that he was! How their looks made fathomless exchange in those hours when the man's hands enfolded those of his wife—long hands, yet little and white, like angel twins!

Soon she no longer need lean wholly and always on him. She parted a little from her great shadow. It was enough for her that he looked at her. Then it sufficed her that the sun was shining. She began to risk solitude, to make trial of it, as a young bird tries itself in space. Once when Jean was away and morning was arriving—though it was gloomy and wet —she raised her head in ecstasy, and only because of herself and life!

Restoration, metamorphosis! A sweet new being had released itself from her and was taking her place. Her body had won harmony and completeness, the

lines of her flesh were curved, she had expanded like a ripe fruit!

When we caught sight of her that season, we wondered at her before we recognised her, so thoroughly had she begun again. How she restored the balance now with the strong and handsome husband who had dowered her with a share of his life, his vitality, with a part in the Paradise of life!

And the transformation went on, and continued to shine upon her. Her eyes grew clearer; their outlook changed, and her movements, and her thoughts.

And at this moment the disturbing Lambert traversed their destiny.

Then—then, she was fascinated by him. She tottered, decided passionately, and threw herself at him.

A hideous and terrible instinct, maybe, but logical. Had she not been changed from head to heels, even to the shadows of her flesh? Had she not become a real woman, and therefore another woman, in whom another heart beat?

In a flash, in a glance, she forgot not only her abiding adoration of the other, but also her former dislike for this one. If she thought at all of those old dreams, it was that she might scatter them, might detest them! The past no longer mattered; it was dead. Better than that, it had been killed. Nothing was left alive in front of the outrush of her whole being, renewed and virginal, of the force of her first love.

A LIBATION

GUS PACHECO and I had become incomparably friends.

You see me—I am tall, broad, and strong, and I have big blue eyes. No doubt, therefore, you are expecting me to describe my faithful comrade of the pampa as a little fellow, thin and weasel-faced, seeming to sparkle all over with quick black eyes? For it is unheard of, isn't it, that two boon companions should not be at the physical antipodes of each other? Well, it was not so. In spite of the unchanging conventions of romance, tradition and literature, we were, although perfect friends, perfectly alike in looks.

As I appear to your honourable observation, so my *alter ego* (as bygone Italians used to say) appeared in comparison with me on the stock-farms of Don Gregorio at San Juan del Gato—St. John of the Cat, if you are anxious to know. And so he would appear to-day even, if—if I had not a drama to relate to you.

Ah, most certainly there had to be a big lot of gallops together before we knew each other and joined hands like that, so little loquacious as we were. There had to be a mort of work in common, among our companions and among the immense herds that surrounded the farm like a scattered ocean, a mort of adventures and combats shared, before we could thus rub off be-

tween us that solid mysterious armour in which every man lives confined.

The cause of that friendship? I don't know it. I can no more explain the reason of it than that of day and night, which all the same I am forced to see and not to see. I can only say one thing, at the risk of saying it a hundred times, like a bigot—we were extremely fond of each other.

At the beginning of spring Mahica came to the farm along with the master and mistress. She was one of the señora's servants. In point of fact, she was the servant of no one on earth. With her beautiful head held in unnatural haughtiness, she seemed to rebel against everything, even against time as it went by, and I imagine that when she reached the hour of prayer, with the good Lord in person, it wouldn't go off quite smoothly!

Mahica! She was like no other woman. That is very certain, seeing that she was the most precious of all that live, with her Indian eyes blacker than the deeps, her hair blacker than night, her cheeks and her arms of gold! I cannot recall her without feeling a contrast of pallor overspread my face.

Yes, noble caballeros, love is tragic, and life is not comic at all. And yet, if I pity all future men, it is not so much that they have to begin over again our use of time, as that they are certain never to see that woman make her appearance in the daylight of a winding path, or in the shadow of a doorway!

But how capricious she revealed herself, how disconcerting, how rudely mocking or hastily gloomy! One used to see her come out of the little "Grey

House" where she rested, leading her leopard in leash with a ribbon. The latter, already as big as its father and mother, was as harmless as the lamb called Pascal. No doubt it had not tasted warm blood. That is the rule for those beasts; they only become savage on the day when that savour is no longer a secret to them.

And then? Here I fall back completely among the old traditional tags. I fell desperately in love with this Mahica, so sumptuous to see. I loved her all the more that the untamable savage bestowed ferocious glances on me at the outset. This fierce rebellion, in a being dowered with the visage of the rising sun, maddened me to the highest degree, so that I hardly noticed the grief that my adopted brother Gus felt, through my gradual desertion of him. Lord! There are cyclones in men's destinies that turn gentle monotonies of sentiment upside down; and I even bore my friend a mild grudge for not realising or admitting that a passion of such dimensions as mine justified my negligence in his regard!

As for her, several signs enabled me soon to guess that her bloodthirsty and raging coldness, if I may put it that way, was only apparent. In particular I saw several times, without being seen, that the starry face which scowled at me in public was turned benevolently towards the farm-building where I lodged alone with Gus.

One day I ventured to speak to her about something or other; another day, of myself. She tried at first to overawe me with a manner that in turns was queer, haughty, and threatening. Then she lowered her head and listened to me. At the end of the fol-

lowing fortnight I obtained from her the promise of a nocturnal rendezvous.

In the afternoon before that great evening I was with Gus. He looked so sullen, and I felt so happy, that I ended by telling him my good fortune.

And behold!—my Gus begins to sigh, wanders this way and that, and finally leans against a tree, with dangling arms. There was reason—the poor boy loved Mahica!

By dint of shaking him, I made him confess it. And as I continued to shake him, he added that Mahica loved him, too—or at least that she had sworn it to him.

By all the saints in hell and all the fiends of paradise, I was completely bowled over! I clenched my huge fist—and dealt myself a formidable thump on the chest.

The truth put my eyes out, as they stupidly say. Yes, they loved each other. One detail after another established it. And I—I had only been the horrible intruder between them! One thing puzzled me much —this positive, indisputable rendezvous that she had granted me. But I had only the more shame that I had intimidated her, and I said to Gus, "I forced a rendezvous from her for to-night. Go in my place."

He looked at me, and then said, "I will." So saying, we parted.

They who do not understand my action, neither have they understood how deeply Gus was my friend and I his.

I began to wander, alone, in the wood, and night

fell. It seemed to fall like a storm, that was all the more terrible for being silent.

Night; I was still wandering. Suddenly I start—there—that is the Grey House! My steps had led me to the place where she was waiting for me; and by a sort of miracle or dark genius of my being, it was the actual time for the rendezvous.

Ah, no punishment was to be spared me! Actually, a man was gliding towards the house. The grey ghost showed against the grey of the wall, and it resembled me like a brother. It might have been I, but it was he. He went in.

And while I moved backwards away, with a grimace of torture, my clenched hands on my forehead, and keeping silence only with all my strength, I heard a horrible cry come from the house!

After that, I no longer know clearly—the leopard!

When we had all, with our torches and our revolvers, pulled Gus away from the beast, he was only a bloody ruin, his chest mangled, his neck gnawed.

In good sooth, during those moments I was like him—helpless and heart-torn. Then, little by little, I understood; the ambush, to which fate had led him in my stead—and the wild beast let loose on *me*.

In my stupor, an obsessing thought fastened upon me. How had it come about that an animal so innocent till then had suddenly slain? I discovered that secret. On the golden arm of the Indian I detected a small laceration, hardly healed. And I had a nightmare vision of the inhuman libation of warm blood that she had cast to the monster—before she waited for me.

A DREAM TOO GOOD

TOWARDS the end of their stay at Park House the games of the two children became more serious. They who had never been separated were sometimes surprised to see each other, and stared.

One evening his eyes sought her from the brink of a room she had just entered. One could not see her clearly in the shadow, and the whole room seemed to smile. He stood rooted there, and said nothing—even his lips dared not stir—but he felt that she had become the only being in the world.

He lived the days that followed in the wonderment of that evening. He shut up that souvenir in his large and sensitive heart. He did not speak of it—either to others or to her—hardly to himself, and quietly. He became radiantly reserved, busily thinking of her, even when she was there.

As for her, she seemed to be waiting for him to speak.

The separation, which was to last a year, drew nigh. Quickly the last day came and ended.

The last evening, as on the others, they wandered together in the grounds, side by side. Then, as always, an old maternal voice called to them from the house, and they went in. And while they came along the main drive, he reflected that he would not see her for a long time. He looked at her askance, leaning a

little forward as she walked, her face and hands so dainty, drawn in light and fragile lines; and he regretted that he had not spoken. There ought to have been a word, something of decision against the uncertainty of fate. But it was too late. Already they could see the gleaming front of the house through the rounded and bluish trees that looked like peacocks. Up to the last, they were separated by everybody.

They said "Good-bye till the summer!" But unexpected journeys and changed circumstances scattered the important people on whom they relied.

One, two, three years went by.

He knew nothing about her. Only rarely, in conversation at long intervals, he heard her name go singing by.

But he lived for her. After those hard-worked days when so much time is lost in things essential, closing his eyes, he saw her again, and all his weariness was compensated. Truly, it was not a cruel separation for him, for everywhere and always he made a paradise again around her.

Less than ever he spoke of her. He could not be otherwise than alone to think of her; his love was too great and pure; he had deified it overmuch. Invincibly he enclosed within himself those confidences with which others touch one's heart.

He wanted to write to her, but could not. Of what use are words? The future was so splendid and so sure! When he was counting the days, at those weary moments when everything seems precarious and threatening, or when one is really forced to be anxious, the sweetness of his dream removed his fears.

When the two families returned to Park House, he was nineteen and she seventeen.

So great an event was it to see her again that he delayed his arrival for several days. Yet when he saw her, he had no surprise.

She was the same; as dainty and fair, but much more developed. She had increased in beauty without changing, being herself a miracle. And in the first look they shared he recognised her still better.

The idyll made ready, exciting and grand. Everything showed and proved to them—everything around them and on their own faces—that they had chosen each other. But although she sometimes seemed very thoughtful, full of a caressing silence and an offering of attentiveness, he said nothing to her. He would speak to her some day and he would listen to her, but words were still things too formal for the infinity of their nearness to each other.

He saw little of her. It was not so easy to be together as formerly. Little obstacles kept them apart, hour after hour. Sometimes, in moments of reflection, he would come to perceiving that time was passing. Then this anxiety struck him as sacrilege; that was only a detail, and he forgot it.

Once when she was surrounded by a group who discussed the stars, she said, "I often open my window at night, my window on the ground floor, on the edge of the road, and I look out, though I don't see anything. Yes, almost every night."

And he, trembling in all his body while the talk passed on elsewhere, asked himself if it had been for him that she said it.

In himself, little by little, he dared to believe it; he dared to hear the great appeal she had uttered. It was for him, for him, that she opened her window in the dark. Yes, the time had come. Yes, one evening very soon he would go down there to the side of the house. He pictured to himself the heavenly meeting, and the words that would begin there, never again to end. For nights on end he invented them, and learned them like a poem, his heart throbbing, drunk with glory.

He postponed the pilgrimage. Oh, not yet! Speak to *her,* to her whom he only looked at with caution! When on the point of coming so much nearer to her, he said to himself, "Already!" and stopped, dazzled by even the beauty of the action.

And then an unlooked-for circumstance curtailed the stay of his people. One afternoon they said, "We are going away to-morrow!"—and suddenly, this was the last evening.

In his room that night he was seized with terrible distress. He had not spoken; he had done nothing, and now it was too late.

Too late, he opened his eyes. Distinctly he saw his fault, his disease, his weakness. What was the matter with him, that he had never acted, never spoken, but obstinately vegetated in an empty dream, in an illusion of existence?

At one moment he said to himself, "To-night?" He half rose, trembling. This very evening? Suppose she was still there, waiting? No! He rejected the senseless notion at once, and fell back in his chair. It was too late, he felt certain. No doubt she had

waited for a long time, but she must have given it up days ago.

He groaned, in hatred and scorn of himself, until weariness took pity on him.

And long, long afterwards, in the first glimmering of dawn, the other window, on the edge of the road, was shut with a sob.

It is too late! That was the too brief litany in which henceforth he cradled the mourning of his heart, his return into the world.

But great news changed the appearance of things; she was coming to Paris.

In the last month of autumn he saw her, visiting friends. She was haughty, reserved—very different. So he looked away from her; she had regained herself, all was over, and although she was there, she was lost for ever.

And in spite of all, he felt that the immense innocence of his heart had been wounded. A fierce pride sealed his lips. He was cold, distant, quivering, and heart-rent. He left, and went up his street as up Gethsemane.

Weeks went by. One day he heard by chance that some one had proposed to her and been rejected. He lifted his head again, rich in a poverty-stricken hope.

This time, as soon as he was alone with himself, he came to strong decisions, without indulgence. He would have an explanation with her; he would act. It appeared so easy to him that his former hesitation amazed him. He tried to see the meaning of it, and lost himself, head in hands.

To act! To settle his position definitely at once. It was only a matter of days. He busied himself with it fiercely, and resumed the measures he had left in abeyance. He made an appointment. He said to himself, and repeated it aloud, "Now is the time. I must speak. Yes, at once, to-morrow!"

But the next day he was informed that she had just got engaged.

He had such a habit of silence and self-concealment that no one saw how frightfully the revelation wounded him. As soon as the door of his room was closed upon him he cried in the low voice of despair, "Her!" And standing but swaying, he saw himself in the mirror make a sign of refusal! He did not consent. He rejected the disaster with all the strength of his life. Then, for the first time, he hurled himself into a peremptory decision—to see her! With feverish and shaking hand, he seized his hat and cloak. He went out, leaving the door open, the room yawning.

He took the tram-cars, got down at some cross-ways of black night, and ran.

It was she herself who opened the gate to him. He saw her in the dark because of her voice.

"What do you want?" she said.

"To see you—to speak to you," he began at last. "I—I——"

"It is too late to speak to me." In a gesture of farewell she raised a hand, where for the first time there shone a ring. He only saw the hand coming out of the dark, and then he only saw the ring, that real and final thing.

Against that, he found nothing to say. He recoiled a few steps and went away, chanting a subdued but groaning recitative—"It is too late—I knew it—I always said so!"

A TRUE JUDGE

IT was in the year of grace 1827, on the first of December. As she had intimated, Priscilla Hawkins returned to the conjugal hearth in the evening. In the midst of the noise of wheels which disappeared along the paved street, she knocked. The servant opened to her as before, and without speaking. She ascended the steps in the porch, gently pushed open the drawing-room door, and—strange as it may appear—she was there.

The judge had raised his proud white head. Since the message she had sent him, he had waited for her so passionately that he had to make a great effort to hide his surprise on seeing her at last.

"It's you?"

It was a stammering whisper, either from emotion or so that he would not frighten away the young woman who stood, still hesitant, on the threshold. With a tranquil air he rose and went towards her. They shook hands and welcomed each other, using customary phrases, but gravely and timidly, in spite of all.

She looked round her. Nothing had changed since she went away, six months before. The old gentleman had taken all measures to ensure that the erring wife's return should pass off as a quite simple happening, and even customary—a peaceful incident of an

evening—and that there should be no sign of joy-making or word of forgiveness, that there should be nothing but a resumption of the times that had been interrupted.

She sat down in the orange-coloured armchair. She was wearing a hat with strings of periwinkle blue, a dress with multiplied flounces of bright green, the colour of sunny foliage, very like the one she wore on the day she went away. Her blue eyes made her ever-rosy face seem transparent, and the spiral curls of her hair were making the little movements which the fashion of that time required.

She smiled faintly. And he smiled too, so as to be like her. Both tried hard to look as if they were not thinking of the only thing there was. The judge was fidgety, and rubbed his hands together without cause. He began a sentence, stopped, hesitated, and then, having coughed, made up his mind:

"Would you like to have dinner, my dear?"

"Certainly," she said. She took off her hat, and as she handed it to the old servant she looked at her, and said in a kind sad way, "Good evening, Betty."

The old woman made no sign, as if she had not heard; she was carrying out too well her master's instructions.

They dined. The old gentleman told some fox-hunting tales. She listened, and smiled politely, as one does when making calls. Sometimes, with an effort, she said, "Ah, ah!"

After dinner they sat down opposite each other. They talked for a few hours more, then words became scarcer. Silence followed, nor could they repel it.

They both dared at last to understand that their life would never be what it had been; that to meet again was not enough to bring them together, that the past could not be healed. Possessed more and more by this idea, soon they could no longer dissemble. He shut his eyes, so that he could think. She wiped away a tear.

When their silence had still more increased and frozen, he raised his fine angular face from the black silk that draped his neck, and said, "We must regret nothing."

She replied with a sob, and forthwith fell into a terrible paroxysm of tears, her hands pressed upon her eyes.

The judge's face reddened a little, and his eyelids winked. When she was a little more calm and subdued, he urged her paternally to go and lie down. She got up like a little girl. Just as she was going to say "good-night," she hesitated, and was silent. Quite gently, she was no longer there.

As long as she moved about the room where she had gone to vanish, as long as there filtered through the ceiling the indistinct murmur, mingled and innocent, of her movements, the good man listened.

Then, when the world was silent again, he took his chin in hand, as he did in the courts.

Facing himself, he became the judge who seeks to know what he must believe and what he should do. He questioned himself, recalled memories and portraits; he listened to voices.

What was Priscilla? The lovely apparition which the name evoked openly and at once declared—she was

sweetness, weakness. And what else? Nothing else; that only. Whatever her lot might be, she did not deserve to be harmed.

She had married him innocently, in all sweetness and weakness. He had known her as a child. When she was taller, when she had reached the age that angels seem to be, he had asked for her in wedlock, and had got her. She had wished nothing and decided nothing. He had selected her, *he* had, as he would a rose. Her consent was only the grace that comprised her, her smile was only the sweet scent of her. For eight years, beside this man with white hair, she had continued to be beautiful and to adorn all about her. After that, she began to look sad, and she had cried, loyally. He could not see that sadness at first; then he could not understand it; then he did not wish it. He did not try to get to know the other's name. And she had gone away, in gala array in spite of her tears, at the beginning of the spring. She returned with the winter, in despair, in spite of the smile in which she tried to disguise herself.

In all this, the judge tried to find something that was a fault; and he did not find it. He turned it over again—a long, long time—and concluded at last that it was he who must beg Priscilla's pardon.

In these tremors the night wore away. A little grey light was creeping through the panes and becoming slowly clearer, when the judge went stooping to his room. He saw—and passed by—that doorway to life which divided their rooms. "Should he see her asleep? No"—not in fear of giving way, but in terror of awakening her.

Having finished his toilet, he set off to his work. At once he was recaptured by his habits, absorbed by the accustomed scenes. The square had a carpet of snow and was draped with fog. He crossed it enfolded in the vast amplitude of a cloak that had capes in tiers.

He met gentlemen who trod the snow with long strides in all directions, whose faces smarted and their eyes watered in the cold wind; and they also were sunk in huge overcoats—of a bluish colour, or like *café-au-lait,* or Spanish tobacco. Snow was everywhere spreading the purity of white paper, with drawings on it, here and there. It was making the scarlet sign of the hotel look vivid as underdone sirloin, and freshly restoring the bootmaker's green shop front. Then a slight rain began to pencil the faded house-fronts with thin and regular lines. A cab, sharp and black as a pen drawing, was climbing Bessemer Lane, where the pointed stones were set in white instead of in black.

The judge plunged into a porch, passed along a corridor, where attendants made themselves small and murmured, "My Lord," and entered a huge hall, severely paved with big black and white slabs.

He sat down at a table where heaps of papers were arranged and began to examine the cases in which judgment was to be delivered in that day's sitting.

He had completely shaken off his personal anxieties. As duty required, he was now only a judge, bent upon his office. He had regained his energetic precision of mind, his searching glance, and—behind the railings of his wrinkles—his inexorable air.

The first case was that of Fauke v. Fauke, a story of adultery; a light-headed woman, a good man forsaken. His eyebrows contracted. He reread the circumstances. Whatever they were, the culprit had transgressed of her own free will. Then there was no excuse. The conclusion he had arrived at on the first hearing was confirmed, and he decided that this woman must be severely punished.

THE THREE MAD-WOMEN

THE three patrons, having finished their accustomed inspection, were conducted with much bowing by the directors and managers of the asylum as far as the door which overlooks the fields.

The marchioness begged them to return into the institution where the miserable recluses required their attention, and the three old ladies, left alone, sat down on the stone seat to await their motor-car.

Evening was falling, and on the white walls of the garden of the mad and on the last of the urban enclosures it spread slight mourning. In deep reflection on the dismal dormitories and the strangely animated cells the three rich ladies contemplated the evening, which comes miraculously, for you do not see it come.

They sighed together, nor was there anything surprising in it, seeing that they were of the same age, devoted themselves to the same work, resembled each other, and had their minds full just then of the same pictures—all that tragic procession of accursed, of shriekers, of martyrs, whose lot was allayed between the committee's costly walls.

Escaped therefrom, the three patronesses sat in wonder, with renewed visions of the poor restless Marionette to whom God had been cruel in order to punish her sons; of her next whose backward brain left her a useless object in the cavern of a room; and

of the melancholy mad, gnawed by her heart as by a cancer. And if our visitors were too used to the sights to be upset by them, none the less they remained on the seat very soberly, like three little girls.

"The car isn't coming. Constant cannot have understood. He never understands," declared the leader.

As she uttered these words, a couple came into sight from the other end of the Rue des Ramparts, which ended at their feet. It was the tax-collector and his wife. They did not see the three ladies, and drew closer to each other, tenderly, in the greyness of evening. They came on into the shadow of a tall house that towered above the street-wall, and drawing still nearer, they kissed, under the wing of the house.

The president said "Ah!" as one sighs, and the two other ladies heard her sighing. Their eyes followed the lovers, and there was something a little curious in the way they admired them, charitably disposed as they were. When the young couple had passed along the road—so near, and yet wandering in another world—one of the ladies murmured, in a carefully low voice, "God bless them!"

The two others at once said, "Yes," as if it had been a question.

Thanks to the darkness, which continued infinitely to fall from heaven or rise from earth, this corner of the country grew smaller, smaller, till it was like a confessional box, where one thinks aloud.

The marchioness's lips framed some explanation of the chauffeur's remissness, some misunderstanding, but it was not the moment for that sort of reflection.

No doubt it was the vision of the mad-women, of the two divinely blind beings, of the evening that draws in all trifles, that had altered the face of things, for instead of speaking of her chauffeur, she confessed: "I have been young." She added, "I remember it still."

She bowed her shoulders, and they trembled as when touched in benediction. One noticed her white hair, her cheeks, white also and soft, her cheeks of cotton-wool. One even noticed how pink her eyelids were, worn out by the days that had run away, drop by drop. It was a moment when secrets can no longer defend themselves, when silence can no longer conceal all things, when one's heart is opened.

She who had just said suddenly, "I have been young," now stammered:

"I have been mad, I have been mad! I have had in my life an unspeakable crisis, which passed like a great dream. Yes, I, such as I was, such as I am, mad like those we saw just now. True, it is a long time since.

"We had been settled some little time. Jacques had just had his salary raised, and our Marthe was two years old. Well, I wanted to finish with all, and go after another man. One night I was stealing softly through the house, to go away for ever. The little one was crying in her cot while I was gliding towards the door.

"Yes, I know; I did not go. But that was a chance —because I could not open the wardrobe where all my things were. That was the only reason, that trifle, why I did not cross the threshold, why I continued to

stay at home. But for that silly detail, all would have been upset. When I think of that error, pushed so far, of that crime begun, of that abyss into which I had actually thrown myself, I am stupefied and do not understand. All seems insane to me, in that nightmare which I had thought of for months, wished for for weeks, and walked in for a night. I know no more about it, only that it was. I cannot even regret it, so far removed I am from the woman who was tempted to the very brink. Long, long ago I became myself again, beside my poor husband who is so ill; and I have only one more hope on earth—to die before him."

The second lady very quickly took up the tale, in the midst of the obscurity which more and more completely united their hearts, their poor infectious hearts:

"I, too, I have been mad. Ah, when that young man, when that Olivier who used to smile at me so handsomely and proudly, began to seek my daughter's company! She was seventeen and he twenty-five; it was natural. But I, I would not have it, and I fought against it, and I did all I could that I might not be tortured. What did I *not* ask and contrive in my prayers? What did I *not* dream of that was unjust and merciless? He, he never knew anything of it. He did not know how madly happy and unhappy he had made me, when he came so near to me only to turn away again. He thought he had to do with a normal woman, even at the moments when I most loved him. Ah, I have been mad—I was free, and yet imprisoned! They became more and more inti-

mate. They had a daughter; and now my prayer, which will perhaps be granted, is only—O my God!—to have a great-grandchild!"

"And I too," the third patroness went on in a sedate voice, "I have been something like them, like you. It was also because of a man who came into my life, a life already settled down, which really means already ended. One day he spoke to me brutally, before everybody. He had no right to do it—you understand me—but what despairing gratitude I dedicated to him, for having just a moment thought of me! Later he grew a little sociable. It was terrible. I heard abominable things about him that they proved to me, and yet I could not believe them until afterwards. But everything made me like him best. Nothing happened between us. But I have been mad; I know it well, seeing I am no longer so, and sometimes I seem to remember yet how I then hated everybody, and all my family. I hated them so much that I was happier by hating than by loving. How could I have changed so much—how? I do not try to explain it to myself. There is no more accounting for heart-disease than for the other sorts."

They were silent.

"Youth is a delirium that passes," the oldest of the three friends concluded gently. "These are the disordered dreams that one has, some night or other. Next morning, in the daylight, one is older, and tranquil. You see it is not even difficult to talk about it; it is so completely done with."

She uttered these extraordinary words in an entirely peaceful tone. She brushed some dust from

her gown of black satin, and stood up. Her companions got up too, and made their way towards the principal gate, where the chauffeur, insufficiently instructed, was doubtless waiting. They became silhouettes, sumptuous and slender, which gave them an air of imitating young women. They followed the madhouse wall along, feeling themselves healed and serene, and all three wearing the same smile of old age and convalescence.

THE SENSITIVE PLANT

HE had a name, said Jimmy, that might have broken your jaw. I've forgotten what it was exactly, although it belonged to my closest companion. The fact is that this was at a far-off and exciting period—quite damnably so—of my existence, and in that South Africa where such adventures befell me that I regard myself as a romancer when I recall them!

This damned pal, then, this pirate, this brigand, this—but we won't unload the story too quickly—this bankrupt skunk, then, started housekeeping with me in a bush cabin somewhere near Griqualand, at about the time of the Rush.

Those of you, gentlemen readers, who did not see the commotion that then sent all the diamond-wanters of the world crowding to the Cape, have seen hardly anything, and even if a man has been a hangman or convict-warder, he only has a very besugared idea of what the human animal may become.

For myself, I was something of a blemish among the crowd of my fellow animals. I have always been, I admit, pretty well refined, not only in disposition but in looks. Over yonder my correct English seemed like a foreign language, and of course my youthful face of that time had no sort of affinity with *that* snout.

My companion was—let us speak plainly—a brute. A fierce, uncivilised giant he stood, with a head like a rough chopping-block where thick fair hair grew like a thatch, his huge features shining with sweat, his nose red-painted with whiskey, his shoulders like a travelling trunk.

This rascal, whose name, after torturing my gullet, has finally escaped me, was not a bad sort at bottom, but stupid—my word! and foul-mouthed—oh, wasn't he! Even when you caressed him, you had to be very careful you stroked him the right way.

But whatever the living antithesis we made, we got on pretty well together, and we worked together—I with my head, he with his arms; I as a man, he as a bear.

After months in which we saw no more precious stones than if we had prospected between the stones of Regent Street (though that's not always barren work, if one can believe the gossip of your damned modern newspapers), I decided to go, alone, a point farther west, to get a smell of the news.

That was how I came to reach the Boer village where the inn was kept by one Pickles.

Now this Pickles, a beastly personage whom I suspected of having formerly hunted passers-by in the bush, and his wife, a hideous slattern with a black cape and a yellow nose—these two monsters, I say, had a daughter, a sort of dazzling vision, slight as gossamer, airy as a song, and who was called Rebecca to boot—the most beautiful of names.

God damn me once more if I've ever seen, either in gardens or museums, anything to compare with that

Rebecca, so fair and so pink you would have sworn that Noonday had dusted her hair with gold and polished her cheeks with rosy powder! As for her eyes, as for her smile, there's no way of telling you their brilliance with my voice, nor with ink, either.

And she was also the most tender of sensitive plants. Trembling, starting, of angelic fragility, she blushed and stammered for nothing at all. A word uttered louder than another brought a twitch of uneasiness to her face. It seemed as if words touched her like breath, and dimmed her hue a little.

Between this tender and touching gentleness and my own temperament there was an affinity that drew us near together. And one fine evening she replied with the most adorable of silences to my first avowal, offered in a low voice, a very low voice, and with my face turned away, for fear of making her fly away. Yes, she was silent for a very long time on that great occasion. It was a way of saying "yes" with her heart.

When my working partner came and joined me, my affair with Rebecca had progressed a long way.

Without having exactly said it to each other, we felt that it was going to be a question of proposal, and betrothal, and all that sort of thing.

Now, my companion, as soon as he arrived, was fascinated by the vision of Rebecca. I could not help laughing when I saw, blissfully planted before the little trembling flower, that great rough-hewn block, greyish and huge, like the latter half of an elephant.

And the idea of a wicked joke budded in my un-

merciful mind—the mind of a victorious lover. I concealed from the nameless being—ah, the absence of that name annoys and pursues me as its presence would!—my idyll with Rebecca; and after hoodwinking him by telling him I had found out that he was as love-lorn as the devil, I advised him to reveal his feelings to her.

Very confidingly, I urged him to take the *fortiter in re* course. Yes, I had the ferocious cheek to tell him a long rigmarole by way of showing that the only qualities the young girl esteemed in men were energy, rudeness, and even brutality! In short, I piled up the rudest of jests, without any notion—God might bear me witness, if He would deign to!—that it might have serious results.

The next evening I met my Rebecca, toddling alongside a wall, with her head down. I stopped her and we chatted. I uttered the name of my friend, that frightful name forgotten to-day, enshrouded, buried.

She jumped as if I had struck her.

Good, I said to myself; no doubt about it; my numskull has seen her and has courted her in his own way.

At that moment I was angry with myself for working the sorry joke. Seized with remorse, I forced myself to make excuses for the poor bungler.

But the young girl raised her clear eyes to mine and interrupted me. "I am engaged to him," she said.

"To whom?" I yelled.

"Why," said Rebecca, "to——" and the crystalline

voice repeated that name so hard to swallow, that accursed name, that name repulsive as physic.

Beside myself, I gesticulated: "You! He! But, my dear, he's a brute! He's——"

"That's just why I liked him," she said sweetly; "he spoke to me with authority. Ah, how loud he shouted! If you knew all that he dared to say to me, to *me!* It's inconceivable!"

She had lowered her head, and her nose had been turned by bashfulness into a rose; and she piped—"It's been a revelation."

There! I sat down on a boulder, all of a heap. What else could I do?

Yes, sirs, yes. My sensitive plant had been entirely captivated by the huge blockhead. She had begun, in the twinkling of an eye, and after all the instruction of her youth, to *understand* and to like rudeness and ignominy. Why? For no reason at all —because she had begun to like them, and that's all.

Afterwards? Well, it didn't kill me, since here I am. Like a lunatic I went away from that country of lunatics, and naturally I've forgotten.

But I must say one thing: In the matter of sentimentality, one must not rely on anything—nor on what's left. When a man presumes to talk about love, and to affirm this or that, he risks saying as many foolish things as a doctor does as soon as he ventures to relate the secrets of disease, or as an astronomer when he takes it into his head to explain the real reasons of the comedies of the sun and the moon.

THE APPARITION

TALKING about this, said Etienne, do you know that I'm getting a divorce? No? Well, it *is* so. The proceedings are begun. Jeannine and I, we're going to wait in ante-rooms, seated on forms; then we shall go in and expose our private affairs to people who will not know us any better than doctors do. And as soon as those folks have made their way into our life, we—we shall go out of it. I do not know what will become of her, and I know still less what awaits me in those days, those evenings, when she no longer does it.

Sir, if I am speaking of the affair to you with an air of indifference, it is not only a way of showing that I am upset. It is also because I am occupied with the nasty future left to me, when I am a widower, or rather, almost a widower—no, more than a widower.

I am not accusing any one. It is nothing surprising that this should happen to us as well, of course. Life always finds a way of making everybody's affairs end up badly, because it's the rule, and those that finish well must be begun again.

How did it come about? It was settled suddenly one evening, one great evening. I am going to tell you how it happened, although it's not a very good

story. It has no beginning and no end, and isn't in the least amusing.

You know Jeannine. Even when quite young she was surprising, because too pretty, with her eyes so deeply—so deeply blue, and that sunny hair which would not let night quench it. For years she never ceased to improve—it had to be seen to be believed. She—I—in short, we got married, and we have lived together a good part of our lives—that good part which will be dead in a few days.

During those fifteen years nothing worth mention happened in her life, in mine, in ours; nothing happened, not only nothing that called for reproof, but nothing special.

She set things in order, came and went. I—I worked. I put myself to much trouble in trying to spare her cares and worry. The damned bankruptcy of my first employer has been the only secret I have kept from her. We lived much retired. In the first days we did not want to see any one—we too much preferred each other to other people; and then afterwards we hardly thought of attracting friends. In short, we were happy, weren't we? All that has gone by like a dream, and now I can no longer recall those days very well, now that I've awakened from them.

Then behold that happiness suddenly darkened, about two years ago. Jeannine changed, and the first symptoms of her malady were unaccountably queer. She became absent-minded, nervous, dejected. She began to speak of the things which had always been so in a tone of complaint; for example, that we did

nothing in the evenings, either of us, but just faced each other.

We did nothing, forsooth, because I was stupefied and tired out by the day's work; and then again—a reason which makes all the others unnecessary—it had been like that for three or four thousand nights.

I tried to reason kindly with her, although this injustice had slightly wounded me at heart. She was silent at first; then she argued—her condition becoming worse—and became quarrelsome and perverse. She went so far as to name others to me—weak-minded friends or absurd neighbours, who worked, she insisted, at least as hard as I did, and yet made room for recreation.

The matter of our evenings is only an example. Everything became an excuse to her for fault-finding; everything turned her poor little head upside down. She used to get herself into a terrible state, while I, open-mouthed, had hardly the time to realise what it was about.

My distressful eyes marked the increasing progress of these caprices. She had spells of silence that were worth no more to me—or herself—than her shouts. She emerged from those times with red eyes, or with martyr-like contractions of her face that distorted it for the rest of the day.

This was neurasthenia in all its horror. Doctor Cazeneuve, whom I hurried to one morning before going home, confirmed it, and prescribed bromide and a life without shocks. In distraction I stammered the word "insanity." He shook his spectacled head, and then with a kindly smile advised me to be hope-

ful, "granting the state of the poor child's general health."

Bromide and a peaceful life brought no improvement. Her mental malady got worse, and assumed another shape. Besides her absorption in the corners of the room, when she withdrew within herself as behind a veil, she had now sudden fits of nervous merriment, and moments of inspiration when she stood upright with the face of a nun, and all trembling. One summer morning, as she was opening the window, she began to laugh magnificently—and that laugh hurt me.

I was very unhappy; I pitied her. Then, too, like all sedate and matter-of-fact people, I had a horror of all abnormal, morbid, and mysterious things. I would rather have been trailing a broken leg about than a woman whose reason faltered, and whose delusions shook her like a rag.

Thus it was that the great evening in question came.

If that evening was an extraordinary one, it was so, first, because there was nothing special about it. It was exactly like the former ones, which all resembled each other like drops of falling water. We were sitting in our armchairs, at our respective corners of the fireplace. On the green wallpaper the English engraving preserved its familiar immobility. The chandelier hung there, with its trembling rattle when a motor-bus went by; and the tick-tick of the clock continued to be a noise and a silence at the same time.

She was looking in front of her, with distant eye.

Then suddenly, as I followed her gaze, I felt—I

saw, my friends—that there was some one facing her. There was some one at whom she was looking.

Ah, what a discovery, what a theatrical happening in the eternal set-piece of our room!

Some one—a man, a rival, a sort of robber! Though she was alone with me, she was above all alone with another!

Yes, yes; no doubt about it. There were infinite looks in her eyes, even when they rested on me; an engrossed way of preserving silence, even when she indicated yes or no to me with her head, which confessed all. Some one! Some one opposite her, beside her, standing invisible like the gods of legends, but a real man—worse than a god! A man precisely, with his masculine, sensuous face; I did not know him, I did not invent him—I believed in him, I believed in him.

He had come to her, and he was there now. Everything pointed him out to me more and more clearly. She smiled weakly, and my wild eyes gathered the entangled reflection; she sighed, and I understood well enough that the sigh spoke first to him.

Having begun to understand, I went on without pause.

The timidity impressed upon her, her hesitating ways, something chilly in her gestures, showed me how near he was. Her eyes—full of languor and visions—were half closed one moment, and I saw clearly that she was growing bolder, and that he was touching her.

Thus, nothing supernatural had happened. There was no illness, no insanity. The only changed thing

was a heart—and one never has the right to say that a heart is mad. All became clear and logical, by reason of a newcomer unknown to me, and still deliciously unknown to her, some one for whom she was coming to life again.

All the former complication was unravelling itself; all was being explained with fatal simplicity. The faint glory that she seemed sometimes to wear, her tremblings—unformed confessions of longing, at first unconscious and then unutterable—the rapture that stealthily caressed her face, these were right. And her malice, her anger, her injustice were right. I who had thought myself to be the strong-minded victim, I had been the madman and the hangman.

So when, my friends, without any transition, without any paving the way or explanation, I said, "Then we must part," she replied, "Yes."

So saying, Etienne plunged the glance of his lightless green eyes into a glass of absinthe, and, letting it filter through his drooping moustache, he swallowed the potion.

THE LAST STEPS

TOGETHER they were a century and a half old. Their ages separately? Neither of them knew. It was so long since they had ceased to make that division in their years; their natural and reasonable habit of being two years older together, every St. Sylvester's Day, was too old.

So many days, so many seasons, so many years had they lived side by side in the low-built farmhouse whose roof overflowed like wings! It would have astonished them for a moment had you told them they had not always been married.

They each retained something of a shadowy memory, and were more like each other than a brother and a sister. When the village folk saw them strolling, so feeble, and yet so strongly united, they could not help thinking that one of them would soon die, and that then the other would not be able to remain alone.

Winter was unkind to the two ancients. It handled their old windpipes roughly, broke down their backs a little, hollowed their bony cheeks and their ruined jaws. He could see a grey veil before his eyes; she had attacks of dizziness. When May arrived, they felt themselves less caressed by the shade, and less bold in the sunshine. Life became hard of living, like the time when they earned it. It was almost a labour

to start out from the morning so as to arrive at the evening.

One day when he was sitting in front of the house, a little more motionless than the day before, she went off to get some grass for the rabbits. As soon as she was on the other side of the little gate contrived in the fence, she stopped to take breath. That was the first stage of the journey. Then she went on along the road. From the seat where he was sitting, like a child too well-behaved, the old man's hazy eyes could not make her out, but he heard the sound of her steps. He shut his eyes, so that he could see her going away.

When she arrived at the corner of the main street, opposite the respectable house of the Guichet ladies, the old woman opened her eyes wide and fell down, with no cry and no gesture, neither in falling nor after.

A passer-by stopped, and a little girl came skipping up. One goodwife and then another appeared. They carried her into a shop, and saw at once that she was dead.

Houses emptied themselves; the shop and its vicinity became black with people. She was laid out on three chairs; and her yellow face, slightly grimacing, seemed like a terrible portrait of her they had known.

"The old man must be told," some one said.

"No!" some voices cried; "not him—his daughter-in-law first. There she is. Hey, Marguerite!"

The woman came up, ugly and timid, with her dress hanging loosely from her scanty shoulders, her cheeks dried and grey as poor bread. Her calling—she was a washerwoman—had boiled her hands, and she swung them like parcels.

When she saw the body of her man's mother—he too had been gone a long time and she was just beginning to forget him—Marguerite trembled from head to foot. Her lips went white and her big eyes rolled in her flat face. She sniffled, rubbed her nose with her apron, and whispered, "Poor old man!"

She turned awkwardly to the crowd, without looking at anybody. "No one must tell the old man; I'll tell him myself." And she made a grimace of entreaty.

Then the black patch of the crowd broke up in all directions, grew lighter, and faded away.

Marguerite had the corpse carried to her own bed. When she had hastily arranged the room, she went to the old man. Seated in front of his house, under the wing-like edge of the roof, he was waiting.

As the wooden gate slammed, he started, and raised his head.

"It's me," said Marguerite. He became again like a statue. "Come, Victor, it's time to go in."

Then he groaned funnily, got up, and groaned again. Upright, he stretched his arms out in front of him, and swayed. There seemed to be something shining in his face.

"Well, what is there?" she asked.

"I can't see, I can't see anything at all!" he said.

"Ah!" said Marguerite. It was the simplicity of her soul, no doubt, that made her ready for all great tragedies, for she said no more. She only took the arm of the man who had gone blind at the very moment of his eternal comrade's disappearance.

Dragging his feet, he was led firmly into the

kitchen; he touched the back of a chair, and sat down. But his breath came harshly; he sighed, grumbled, and just when she was going to speak, to tell him—he groaned.

"They're done for—my eyes! That, above all, that!" he cried suddenly.

For several hours he could do nothing but grieve.

In a moment of intermission he asked for his wife. "Where's the old lady? What's she doing, by God!" Another time, between two attacks of melancholy, she saw that he had gathered his wits and was waiting for his wife. Then he uttered complaints, gripped again by the fit, knowing only that he was ill and afraid.

Several people came. Some went in; others looked through the window; but no one dared speak to him.

When the day had passed without his knowing the truth, no one else dared come.

From time to time Marguerite left him, and locked him in. She hurried, her face soiled with wiping tears away. She went to see the dead woman again, who was gradually disappearing in the night, in spite of the two candles. Then she plunged into errands, and making arrangements. She thought of everything, always weary and always running, automatic and heroic, overwhelmed yet insuperable. She knew well enough what had to be done, she of mourning perpetual, she who was so used to surviving!

She was once more beside him when, between evening and night, there came a lull in his grief, which began weakly, and grew longer, and longer.

The woman lighted a little spirit-lamp and placed

it on the high mantelpiece, and thought the moment had come to tell the old man that she who had always been was no more. She planted herself in front of him, as fleshless and as trembling as a scarecrow in a wintry gale. Her head drooped as in shame; and summoning all her strength, as if to shout, she stammered, "She won't come back any more—she can't —she's gone away."

He did not speak. She looked at him then, and saw that he was smiling—and asleep.

She sidled off, and began to tidy things, very gently. Suddenly he moved and called her. She went up so near to him that he could touch her arm with his blind fingers.

"Listen, my girl," he said, "come here; listen. The old woman has come back. She's here. I saw her there, just now, there where you are. I was asleep, and suddenly I knew she was there. She arranged things, and went away again. I didn't move, and I didn't speak, on purpose. Listen; I don't want her to know that I can't see. I don't want—it'll pain her too much. I won't have it. Make her go away just a little while, until I'm well again. Think of some way, my girl."

He bestirred himself on the old seat, which groaned and seemed to be speaking.

"Take her away. Let her go away for a day, or more, if necessary. Tell her—take her away."

"That's good, Victor; I'll see about it. I know. She shan't know—I swear it by the good Lord."

The oath affected the old man, and he said, "You're a good girl," and fell upon religious silence.

The next day she told him an unlikely story of relations who had taken the old lady home with them. He listened in wondering interest, like a very little child. When she had finished, he said, "Then, too, I know she's been back again, last night, while I was asleep; I heard her."

"Yes; she came back," said Marguerite, softly.

Thus two days went by. The day after they had buried the old woman, the doctor came to examine the stricken man.

"Very good!" he said, against all expectations; "there is hardly any fever, and the inflammation is passing away. To-morrow he will see."

She had taken refuge in a corner, stupefied and shrinking. "Yes. To-morrow—to-morrow——"

Down in her dark soul she repeated, very quietly, "To-morrow!"

To-morrow he would open his eyes, and then, really blind, he would not see her! To-morrow his lowly relation would be punished in her heart for her silence, as she would have been punished had she spoken. To-morrow! It is always so in life. There is always a morrow when all ends badly, and the day of peace or of hope that one has sometimes is always only the eve of another.

THE PRESENCE

DID he kiss you?" Bertha asked her old friend.

"Yes, on the cheek."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'I'm going away, but I shall come back to marry you, in spite of all, in spite of everybody. I shall return famous.' "

"He said nothing else?"

"Yes,—vows, and desperate promises, and all one can say. That was in my grandmother's house, in the Rue Neuve. Yes, it was from there that he went away, with his long golden hair.

"Then I began to wait. It was agreed that we should not write to each other, since my parents forbade it. That didn't matter; we knew well enough that we were thinking of each other. I awaited his return one year, two, three, four.

"At the end of the fourth year we saw his portrait here, in an illustrated paper, which spoke of his first excellent work and of his still brighter future.

"This first echo of fame, which showed me his promise coming to reality, excited me. I thought our meeting was near. I got ready for his sending for me or his coming to me. I waited for a sign from him.

"No doubt he, too, was waiting for a sign from me, or perhaps there was something else. But little

by little the months and years went by. Our separation remained; *and little by little he never came back.* My great man, my wonderful fiancé, I have only seen him since in newspaper illustrations, on picture postcards, and in that statuette there, which they unveiled three years after his death, three years ago."

Madame Louis lifted the falling cloud of the lace curtain, and looked through the window at the public square, embroidered with pointed roofs, and as grey as if it were raining. Twilight was beginning peacefully to wash away the colours, leaving still intact only the black silhouettes of roofs, drawn upon the sky. In the middle of the square, upon a pedestal, one could see the whitish bust projecting that the town had erected in honour of its illustrious citizen.

The lady sank back into the feeble twilight of the room. She was not quite old, and still retained traces of coquettishness. Her hair, once fair, should have been grey, but it was yellow. A lace collar encircled her neck.

"When I understood that he would not come back any more, I thought I should die. Then I married the first that came, a gentleman of this town. Some years after my marriage *his* fame increased, as you know, so quickly, so quickly! It was unique. And soon they talked of no one but him, here in the country of his birth, as they did all over the world. As for me, it's now thirty-five years since I got married."

Bertha's cap nodded; on both sides of it, on the rusty temples, were black bands that looked as if marked on with ink. Eager, attentive, sympathetic, and wearing a long black dress with stuff-covered but-

tons, she looked like a priest. She leaned forward, so that she could see Madame Louis better, and take in what she said.

"How sorry you must be not to have married such a man!"

"No," said the lady.

"You are resigned to your lot?"

Madame Louis' gesture meant "no" again.

"I have no cause to be resigned," she said; "I am lucky in not having committed the folly of marrying my first fiancé."

"You were afraid that a great artist——"

"It's not that. It's because he's dead. But the other, mine, he who was not equal to him formerly, he lives, he lives! We are alive! He has no talent; he does not even understand what fame is; he's almost nothing. But he's there, and I have him. Our every-day life is without attractiveness; it might be deaf and blind; it's useless; it's whatever you like, but it is. We are living, we continue to live, we are part of reality. I am not all alone, walled up in a house too big, with a frigid memory, shrouded with sorrow, struck off the list of the living!

"Morning, evening, and night, some one lives beside me, standing, sitting, lying. Every minute my poor husband touches me, elbows me. At daybreak, when a little light comes between the curtains into the heavy night of our bedroom, if I wake up first, and if, among the still shapeless furniture, I see him asleep by my side, his big face all grey, and buried in the pillow, the meaning of emptiness is revealed to me. I start and stifle a cry. Then he moves, sighs, breathes, and sits

up, stammering; and I realise that life is, after all, everything; and that the rest—past or otherwise—hardly counts.

"We exchange words from time to time—never unusual—good morning, thanks, yes, no—but when one thinks of the silence of death and of memory, those words begin to assume a real significance which has no end."

She shook her head: "Yes, yes, yes," she said. "Ah, those who have had life for a long time understand it in the end, and in the end they become miserly of it. And then they esteem the remainder of a poor present creature more than dazzling phantoms, dreamed of or disappeared.

"Why, it's his time—the time when the house calls him. There he is, down there, coming home."

At the other side of the square, on the edge of the pavement, a human mass was standing, enveloped in overcoats. The gentleman hesitated to cross over; his stick trembled at the end of a stiffened arm. He was looking to right and to left, to make sure that no vehicle was approaching in the distance.

At last he ventured into the roadway, walking with diligent, uncertain steps. In the middle of the square, opposite the predominant monument so perfectly white and dead, the big old man began to cough; a spasm of coughing shook him from head to foot. A little farther a sudden gust of wind seized him. He had hard work to get himself out of it. Then he succeeded in reaching the kind foot path, and drew near his house.

They watched him finishing the last steps of his

daily walk, and now, when he reached the door, he put his hand forth. Truly he had the importance and sweetness—nameless but limitless—of survivors. It was true that the coming of this dull old man brought with it a kind of good news.

The sunset, diffusing itself colourlessly everywhere, dominated and surpassed all the sunsets that had ever shone upon the world, for, up till that moment, it was the last sunset of all. Through the grimy clouds and the biting wind, over all the damp and dirty scene, fell the evening which, naturally, was the evening of all evenings; and the end of that pale winter's day shone distinguished above the centuries.

THE INNOCENT

THERE are some people, said Jean Brot, who gesticulate and run this way and that, in great emergencies, like game surrounded; while others, after gaping, fall and keep silence in the first available corner. I was of the latter, at the time I am speaking of, my good friends, and I gave way pitifully when my beautiful Regina, driven to extremes by my meekness and patience, had triumphantly exploded her infamy upon me.

I can see again in detail the historic scene when the fastidious child's vengeance burst upon my loyal trust. Quivering all over, I went to find her. "Madame is not here, but she is coming back soon."

"Very well!" I growled. I went like a gale of wind into the boudoir, keeping my hat and overcoat on, and crushing the terrible accusing letter in my shaking hand.

Seated on the edge of a lacquered armchair, in the nimbus of a rosy-skirted lamp, I waited shivering for five hours and a half. Regina came back at one o'clock in the morning. Muffled and flippant she came, her cheeks pertly pink, and her big magnificent eyes all shining.

At sight of me, her lips parted, as if to set up some agreeable alibi. Without saying a word, I flourished the letter. She seized it and ran through it.

I acknowledge the fortitude which that frail being showed in the emergency. There was hardly the least flutter of her beautiful eyelids, adorned with lashes as long as the fringes of wings. She threw the unanswerable paper into her bag, held up her head, eyed me from head to foot, and discovering that I was wearing my hat, she called me a cad.

"Is it true, all that?" I stammered, pointing at the letter with my trembling hand—a slave's impotent hand.

"Yes, it is!" she cried, in an extraordinary transport of fury; "yes, it is, it's true; and besides that, there's this as well, and that, and this——"

And with all her might, with glittering eyes, and indomitable as a prima donna in full song, she related to me in choice detail all her deceits and betrayals, beginning at the end.

And having spoken, she dismissed me. I got up and went towards the door, bent and staggering. She called me back. Her hand fell on my shoulder, to guide me into the drawing-room, where I went with the shaking movements of the suit of clothes that hangs outside the second-hand dealer's shop-front. Then, with a defiant air, she provided me with supplementary details of one of the most recent and most cynical episodes of our mutual life—if I may put it so. Then she pushed me out, assuring me that I should pay dearly for having treated her as I had, and that I should hear from her.

I did—and the way she did it! You could not imagine the ingenuity, the cleverness, the genius that that young woman displayed in order to make life

impossible for me. She slandered me in all directions with a naturalness and restraint that amounted almost to a prodigy.

It was in vain that I had always been a man of scrupulous propriety; I became an ambiguous and suspicious character. As I came along, backs were turned on me one after another, automatically; hands withdrew themselves out of my reach like frightened birds.

I smiled disdainfully. Then I got angry. I even reached the point of a duel; but the two bullets exchanged had no reaction on my moral position.

Therefore, two things happened. First, not only did I cease to love Regina, but I began to dislike her a little, then much, then fiercely. Second, I lost my situation, could not find another, and one fine morning saw me crossing crestfallen the gangway of a steamer for New York, my second-class ticket being my whole fortune.

In the land of Yankees and redskins I started in the humblest of callings. That is a good omen over there, if one may believe the biographers of the multi-millionaires. As a matter of fact, I became rich.

Do you think that my hatred of the miserable creature whose animosity towards me had been so base and so complete, died away? No; on the contrary, it increased a hundredfold. I was racked by a revengeful desire, all the fiercer that I now had the means to gratify it. I tell you truthfully that some evenings when I was alone in my Broadway office, I literally cried out aloud upon a specious ghost, whose mouth had at once the form of a cherry and a heart, and who

wore, under the darksome curve of her hat, a high crown of copper and gold.

Different circumstances delayed the putting into effect of my campaign of revenge. But I was, you may easily suppose, well informed of the movements and acts of the fury who had so meticulously dishonoured me. Why not acknowledge it? A special office in my "skyscraper," under the pretext of inquiries into the latest European processes in printed fabrics, was actually and seriously engaged in keeping me minutely informed in all matters concerning the Enemy. I followed her with my eyes as do those necromancers in fairy-tales, who at great distances see all they want to see by virtue of the magic ointment rubbed on their eyelids.

When I alighted in Paris, twelve years after slipping away in such severe incognito, my plan was determined—to appear suddenly, to paralyse her with the blunt revelation of my millions, and then to enumerate all my frightful plans of vengeance, before putting them mathematically into effect.

Ah, that evening! I jumped into a motor-car, overburdened, grinding my teeth, ready to shout aloud. We went like lightning to the doorway of a magnificent building.

"Madame Regina? Third courtyard, right through. Fifth floor."

I crossed the courtyards at full speed, and plunged into a lift which deposited me, with French tardiness, opposite a little door. The electric button received a blow of my fist, and the door opened.

"Madame Regina?"

"Come in, sir," said the maid.

With a sigh as from a forge, I went in on the maid's heels, into a narrow corridor. I repeated in a hollow voice—a shout controlled—"Madame Regina?"

"I am she," calmly replied the woman whom I had taken for the servant.

My mouth opened in silence. I looked at her and she looked at me. That flabby face, weary and faded —in irritation I made a violent gesture of denial. I roused myself, and managed to say, "There is some mistake; there is——"

Then she smiled at me, and that smile, like a pale and mournful light, like a will-o'-th'-wisp, brought back to me a light of bygone days.

My hand went over my eyes and my forehead: "Regina? You? No, it is not you—yes, it is—yes, it is you——"

"I recognise you, Jean," said she, ever so tranquilly; "we are no longer angry?"

I did not answer, so much I was looking at her, so much I was trying to remember her.

That was what she had become—*she!*

She was entirely despoiled, wholly disarmed of her beauty. Her eyelids were swollen, her mouth become heavy, her face jumbled with lines. Her attire was careless, her dress poor and thin. Her voice was lower, sleepy and weak.

She coughed, embarrassed by the awkward silence. No doubt she could see how, planted opposite her, it was torturing me to know her and yet not know her. She turned away; and the most awful thing of all, my friends, is that that was the only moment when

my eyes, searching for her far away, were able really to see her again.

I could only mutter, "Twelve years—it's not so very long, after all—not so very long."

Again she ventured her feeble smile towards me. It was an answer, her only answer. When one looks at and touches the truth, one is forced to believe that there are in our deepest depths things impossible, but which are, all the same.

Yes, it was a great deal, it was too much, for it sufficed to turn her face into a sort of ghost of what it had been, and to change it entirely, to the bottom of her eyes and her voice! Yes, entirely, entirely. I drew back, unable to utter a word. It seemed to me that there was nothing like it in the world—a drama so simple. I went back down the dark stairway, feeling my way with the outstretched hands of the poor beggar who does not know what he is asking for.

It was not very complicated, as you see. I had not found her whom I sought. She, the real Regina, the fatal Circe whose resentment had disgraced me and hunted me down—I should never see her again. It was ended; revenge had escaped me. All my dream of passionate malice had faded away at the feet of a stranger, of an innocent.

AFFECTION

September 25th, 1893.

My dear little Louis,

SO it's finished. We shall not see each other again; be as sure of that as I am. *You* did not wish it; you would have submitted to everything for the sake of going on, but we had to separate, so that you could begin your life again. I am not sorry I opposed you —and myself, and us—when you cried so much, with your head buried in our bed, and also when you looked up, twice, with your poor face all shining; and again, when in the evening, in the dark, I could not see your tears any more, though I could feel them, bleeding on to my hands.

And now we are both of us suffering horribly. It is like a nightmare to me. For a few days we shall not be able to believe it. For several months there will be the ache of it. Then convalescence will come.

Only at that moment shall I begin again to write to you, since we have settled that I shall write to you at long intervals. This bond between you and me will be the only one—for you will never know my address, never!—but it will prevent our separation from being wholly laceration.

I kiss you one last time, but so softly, and at so great, peaceful, angelic a distance!

* * * * * *

September 25th, 1894.

MY DEAR LITTLE LOUIS,

I am talking to you again as I promised. We have not been "we" for a year already. I know well, mind, that you have not forgotten me. We are still too much blended for me not to feel your pain itself, every time I *think*.

All the same, these twelve months have not been quite unavailing; they have put a slight veil of mourning over the past. A veil already! Already there are little things that diminish, and even tiny details which are dead. We notice that, don't we, when by chance one of them comes to life again?

I have tried to recall the exact look that you had on your face the first time I saw you, and I have not quite been able to make it come.

Will *you* try to imagine my first looks? You will realise how everything in the world fades away.

The other day I smiled. To whom, at what? At no one; at nothing. It was a jolly beam of sunshine along a lane that forced me to smile in spite of my lips.

I had already for some time been trying to smile. It had seemed to me impossible to learn again how. And yet, as I said, I smiled one day, against myself. I want you, too, more and more often, for the simple reason of the fine weather or even of the future, to raise your head and smile.

* * * * * *

December 17th, 1899.

Here I am again by your side, my little Louis. Am I not just like a dream, now that I come when I like,

but always at the right moment, in the midst of the empty darkness, now that I come and go quite near and yet cannot be touched?

I am not unhappy. I have taken courage again, by new mornings and new seasons repeated. The sun is so friendly and confiding, and even simple daylight is so sensible!

I have danced once. I have laughed often. At first I used to count the times when I laughed and then it became no longer possible to count them.

Yesterday I saw .. fête at sunset. The people were lolling on the ground, like a beautiful garden; and I thought myself happy to be there, while all that multitude was happy too.

I am writing to tell you that, and that I am turning to a new religion in you—Affection. We used to talk about it before, without really knowing it. Let us pray together that we may believe in it, from the bottom of our hearts.

* * * * * *

July 6th, 1904.

The years are going by. Eleven years! I went a long way off, I have come back. I am going away again.

No doubt you have got a home, and no doubt, my big Louis, a little family, to whom your life is material.

And yourself, how are you? I fancy to myself that your face is fuller, your shoulders broader. For a certainty you have few white hairs, and for a cer-

tainty, too, your face has still the same way of lighting up before you smile.

And I? I will not tell you how changed I am into an old woman. Old! Women age more quickly than men, and if I could be by your side, I should look like your mother, both by the look of years and by all that I have got of you in my eyes.

You see how right we were to leave each other like that, now that calm has returned, now that it was almost heedlessly you recognised my writing on the envelope a minute ago.

* * * * * *

September 25th, 1893.

My dear Louis,

It is twenty years now since we left each other.

My dear Louis, *I have been dead for the same period.* If you live long enough to read this letter, sent to you by the same reliable and conscientious hands that posted the others all through the years, you will have forgotten me, and you will forgive me for having killed myself the day after our separation, in my impotence, and not knowing how to live without you.

Yesterday we parted. Look at the date again, at the head of this letter—which you did not see clearly. It was yesterday that you were sobbing in our room, your head buried in the bed, overcome by your weakness and your huge childlike sorrow. Yesterday, near the half-open window, when night had fallen, your tears ran blindly over my hands. It was yesterday that you protested, and that I—I said nothing, with all my might.

And now to-day, in the company of all our things, in our little sublime surroundings, on our table, I have written the four letters you have received at long intervals, and there I am finishing this one, which finishes all.

This evening I shall religiously make all the arrangements for the letters to come to you on their dates, and also for myself never to be found again.

Then I shall disappear from life. It is no use to ask yourself how; a precise detail of those ugly things would leave a stain, and might cause you fresh pain, even after so many years.

The chief thing is that I may succeed in detaching you from me, not by the shock of wounds, but with care and caresses. I want to outlive myself so that I may do this for you. There will be no anguish; you could not stand it, perhaps, with your acute sensitiveness. So I shall come back to you, seldom enough and often enough to obliterate myself little by little from your eyes, and at the same time to spare your heart. And when I do come to tell you the truth, I shall have gained enough time to prevent you almost from understanding all that my death means.

Oh, my little Louis! It seems to me as if there was something of a hideous miracle in this last talk of *to-day,* in which we speak and hear each other so quietly and so far away, I who am only you now, you who hardly any longer know who I was—to-day when the word "now" has a prodigiously different meaning on the lips of those who murmur it as they write it, and those who murmur it as they read it!

Now, across an immense space of time, across eter-

nity—although that may seem absurd—I am really kissing you. And then—I stop myself. For I dare not confess to you, for fear of making myself sad, which is naughty, all that one may madly dream of about love, which is so great, and about Affection, which is too great.

* * * * * *

BOOK III

PITY

THE EVIL EYE

LIKE a curtain, evening was veiling the little house on the edge of the village, the little house with a hat of thatch and a feather of smoke in it.

People who passed that way had to open their eyes wide to see three very small creatures on the seat in front, three childish creatures, of whom two laughed aloud, and the other in a very low tone.

The three whitish-grey things that so resembled each other against the bluish cottage (which had two round windows, like spectacles, and a flat doorway) were a very old man, a very small child, and a doll.

That was all that was left of the family once dwelling there, between the fields and the other houses. Fate had in turn taken away the man, the woman, and the grandmother. Jean-Jean [1] and Grandpa Pierrot held on alone, at either end of a long series of sorrows. Between the two of them—a tremendous void. But they were not of an age when one can see such a gap. One of them no longer knew what the other did not yet know, and they played together with all their heart.

Now, that very evening, when all the people they knew had gone by, two strange beings, with tapering snouts and flashing eyes, turned into the cross-ways.

[1] French babies give themselves the trouble of doubling the single syllables with which they begin to speak.

They were very disconcerting to see, by reason of their long cloaks and bad looks, and above all because one of them was crying.

The sparkling eyes settled on the night-dulled hut, by the door of which a pleasing bush trembled with little white faces. The sharp-featured phantoms signed to each other, finger on lip.

Then they came to a standstill, and buried themselves in the falling dark. When it was thick enough, they exhumed themselves and crept towards the cottage, now shut up and asleep. Touched in a mysterious fashion, the door opened. They entered without making the least noise, like a nightmare in person.

They came out carrying something light-coloured, left the door half open—the devilish smell of a drug breathed from it—and both slipped away, their formidable heads pricked forward.

They descended a footpath, steep and perilous as a rung-robbed ladder, and arrived on the edge of the torrent. There, behind a clump of hazels, arose a sort of quivering shanty—no, a van. The horse's shoes were wrapped up in grass, and the van bristled with branches, no doubt so that it would look by day, against the verdant background of the river's banks, something like a bush.

By the light of a lantern suddenly opened four paws unfolded the stolen bundle. Between the two stooping shadows shone a child of two years, asleep. They undressed Jean-Jean. When he was white as an angel, the creature that was crying just before smiled. They slipped onto the child, who slept heavily, by reason of the drug, some little many-coloured clothes which they

got from a bundle of wearing apparel. It was a fine costume; one, no doubt, which some other child as limited as he had left behind when he started for the queer paradise of the wild people.

Jean-Jean's bonnet was placed on the slippery edge of the furious torrent, and the exotic river-poachers' van resumed its muffled march across the world.

On the straw of the cart little Jean-Jean still slept, not far from a net made of grass, and some trout that shone like shillings. This lowly association made at the same time a difference and a resemblance between the child Jesus in his manger and this newcomer into the universe.

It was only at the end of the afternoon, in the cottage with the door ajar, that old Pierrot awoke by the side of the empty cradle. His dull head rolled from right to left on the pillow, but at last he opened the eyelids of yellow paper.

What shouts, what sobs, what dismay! All the village was roused, such entreaties he made to one and the other!

They found the bonnet on the steep bank, at the foot of which the torrent raged without ceasing, and shattered the stones. They understood everything. The old man had not awakened as usual, and the child had dragged itself outside, and all the way—there. They did not find the body, so there was no funeral.

When he knew that the gentlemen's searches had not worked a miracle, in spite of all the childish trust he had put in them, the old fellow became mournfully appeased. He stopped groaning and whimpering, re-

turned very docile to the house, and sat down with his hands on his knees, orphaned at last of everybody.

Theodore, the grandfather of the mill, who had formerly been—it was so long before!—his cousin, came to see him and keep him company. To that end, he sat down beside him and said nothing, his mouth and his thoughts being occupied with his pipe.

But Pierrot, then, spoke a little. He humoured himself, in presence of Theodore, by enumerating the young ones and little ones that he had seen die round about him. It began with Jeannot, Alexandrine, Thibaut. He recited these names, in the same monotonous eternal order, as others apply themselves to a mournful song.

Once, as he filled his pipe, Theodore spoke, and said: "Perhaps you've got the evil eye."

It was a burst of light. As soon as the sentence was spoken, both men opened their mouths and wagged their heads. Then Pierrot muttered: "I've got the evil eye," and Theodore, who had resumed the silence of his pipe, began softly to think about it, and did not leave off again.

There was no more question of it. That accounted for all—Jeannot, Alexandrine, Thibaut, and the others; and especially Jean-Jean.

Pierrot isolated himself at home. The schoolmaster affirmed, to several people, that he would begin to fret if left alone, and that he ought to see people.

Victorine came and said to him, "You must see people—so-and-so, and so-and-so."

He shook his head: "I've got the evil eye."

"The evil eye—that's true?" said the gossip, uneasily.

"Yes," he replied.

"You never said so," she grumbled.

She went away, looking askance and sniffling. Before that, she used hardly to believe those stories. But when one is getting old, one must not be so fastidious, nor risk tempting Fate.

He shut himself up more and more in the twilight of his house and in the night of himself. He kept his eyes shut, so that he could see the little dead one, and so as not to do harm to little living ones by seeing them.

He believed so deeply in the sorcery of his looks that he held his hand over his eyes as soon as he heard tiny footsteps approaching the window—the window where he waited for the coming of Death, who is too big for one to see. And one day, even, when he noticed Jean-Jean's doll in the depths of a chair, he averted his eyes, and turned gingerly away.

People heard of the precautions he was taking, but all the more they avoided passing near him with children.

And he must have wanted to see them, all the same, so that he would be better able to retain his recollections of the one who had disappeared. For those recollections, too, were disappearing. They were wearing themselves out in the old and laborious, but unskilful, memory.

One fine morning he got the idea that he would go a very long way off. He put some money in the mid-

dle of a bundle of clothes and departed from the village, for he had the supreme ill-luck, at his age, to be entirely free to do what he liked.

The old man, who could no longer lose himself, went along roads and into villages, not allowing himself to see children, trying to retain in completeness a divinely darling picture.

One evening, at the corner of a road which ran beside a river, he saw something funnily shaped—a light van, quilted with leafy branches, and a horse with enormous shoes.

Farther away, around the van, a little thing was jumping about. It was a child, of the age that Jean-Jean would have been by then.

So the old man began to turn on his heels and go away, fearing the effect of his eye. So he did not see that the child was made—exactly in the same way as Jean-Jean—of a drop of sunshine on top of a shred of shadow; nor did he see that the child looked unhappy, nor that a big package was weighing him down.

Yet the bantling, as he trailed and whined under his big burden, was hurrying exactly in the old man's direction. He therefore hastened his steps to avoid him. But after a few moments of this lamentably comical chase, the old man, who no longer knew at all how to walk quickly, stood aside on the edge of the road, like a poor beggar, to let the child go by.

All the while the latter was coming near and then going away, the grandfather leaned forward with open ear and gaping heart, that he might gather as much as he could of that dear childish passing which

would help him to remember his own little one, but he virtuously kept his hand pressed upon his face, and his eyelids closed with all his might upon his evil glances.

THE STONE MAN

THE scarlet sun that was rising from the lake dulled itself on that house-front whose stones were as dark as the slates of the roof, and on the rigid person who stood in the frame of the doorway, whose eyes were hollow and his mouth shut—as stiffly closed as a scar.

The old man was concealing behind him, in the house, a fair-haired child whom he frightened every time he spoke to him in his frozen voice. Pastor Peter Mosen loved Tobie, all the same, this son of his son, but the man was strangely different from other people, thanks to his severe infallibility. Never, on either great or minor occasions, had Peter Mosen yielded to the temptations of evil, nor to those of pity. He had lived without sin, in accordance with the letter of Holy Writ.

He had gradually broken away from all his relations, for he had never forgiven a fault, no matter how light. He had driven his little Gasparine from his house, guilty of loving a man whom he had not appointed, and he had cursed her, naturally.

Nothing could make him reconsider that decision and give way to forgiveness; neither the death of the man who by the contagion of the bad marriage had given his name to the sinner, nor the childish en-

treaties stammered by his own father, the very old Mosen, during the death-struggle.

One evening, several years later, a little girl who had dropped, at the turn in the road, the hand of a woman in mourning, appeared before him and stretched out her arms: "Mamma!" the little girl had implored.

He had said to her coldly, as to some one big, "Begone!"

The little girl, whose fair hair the lave of the light was turning into an aureole and putting stars into her tearful eyes, had sobbed out, "You are a bad man—you will be punished."

He had turned into the house, and shut and bolted the door. True believers know that sin pollutes not only the sinner, but the sinner's children, and those who touch them. The punishment promised by the Lord for whomsoever violates the law lies patiently in wait to snatch away His eternal salvation on the slightest failing; and one must take all precautions against God's dreadful logic.

The old man was no longer capable of relenting. His dread of disobedience had made of him an actual and immovable statue of Duty. He was ready for the Last Judgment, as though already dead.

Now, he was living in company with his grandson, whose parents the Almighty had called away. He loved him as dearly as Isaac did Jacob, but his affection had the demeanour of a secret. He only spoke to the child in a voice lowered and composed, and it was only when he was quite alone that he felt himself smiling at him.

Tobie increased in strength and comeliness. He filled the gloomy house with laughter.

He was seventeen years old, and Peter, almost come to the end of his earthly endeavour, was bearing three-quarters of a century, when one midnight the old man had a dream.

In that dream, a voice told him to go to Tobie's room. He got up and went, feeling his way. Tobie was not in his room. His grandfather called him, and there was no answer. The old man leaned against the wall, seized by mysterious pangs. Through the window-panes his wandering eyes saw pale moonlight in the sky; and his ears were humming. The dream's supernatural voice bade him look in the garden.

He opened the door and saw the lawn, wrapped in a winding-sheet by the moon. He waited. The garden gate creaked. A creeping shadow appeared. It was Tobie returning, and carrying a load.

The young man stumbled upon the old one, and uttered a loud cry. What he was carrying fell on the table with a sound of scattered money.

Suddenly broken and subdued, Tobie sank to the ground, confessing in a voice of terror that he had been thieving.

His teeth chattered as he kept on saying, like a lunatic, that he had robbed the people at the Grey Farm.

The pastor shuddered, for there are cataclysms which make rocks and the solid earth tremble. Hoarse cries came from his throat—"Devil! Accursed! Accursed!"

Then louder he bellowed, in a convulsion of hatred and horror, "And I, too, am accursed—I—I!"

His head turned towards the door. The only possible rescue shone in the saint's eyes, in the disordered shadows—to go and denounce the criminal and proclaim his crime to get rid of him, to snatch himself from him, to drive him with all his crime far away. Yes, thus perhaps the stain that was spreading over his house and race would be wiped out.

The old man moved to the door. But, lo, as he reached the threshold, he raised his arms to heaven, stood high and straight like a poplar, and then fell forward with his face in the soil of the garden!

Tobie, glued to the tableful of gold, looked at the long thunderstruck body, and did nothing.

At last a pallid illumination arose from the horizon —the dawn! The dawn, with its touching promise of golden day and all the riches of the sun!

Then Tobie stood up, collected the golden pieces, went and hid them in the depths of the house; and with a rosy light shining on him he rushed along the road, shouting that his grandfather was dead.

He came back with a doctor and several gabbling women. They lifted the body up and wiped its face. Peter Mosen's eyes were clear, and wide open.

After examining him the doctor said: "He is not dead. He has had a paralytic stroke. He feels, he sees, and he understands, but he cannot move his limbs, or his tongue, or his eyelids."

So the grandson kept the shamefully gotten bag of gold. He was not suspected. He became the master

of the house where the paralytic was lying, for ever doubled up in his armchair.

Soon he brought a woman to the house, a woman whose hair was counterfeit gold, her face bepowdered, her lips painted.

He showed her his grandfather, petrified in his corner, with his open, far-seeing eyes, and his unfathomable thoughts. The woman started with aversion, and blasphemed. But she did not go away, and lived in the house from that moment.

After a little while they ceased to be afraid of the old man; they got used to the vacuity of his presence, and continued, before his eyes and without restraint, the execrable life which bound them together. They quarrelled like heathen, were abominably reconciled, gloried in their vices, and spent the stolen money.

One day Tobie told the story of the robbery, and the woman with the befloured face laughed. Another day, as he came into the room without a thought for the banished and silent grandparent, he told her that an innocent man had been sentenced in his stead. The woman yelped with glee and relief, which increased still more the evening when Tobie came to say that the victims, ruined and turned out, had gone to beg their way through France.

Mute as an open Bible, Peter Mosen witnessed the scandals established in his house—scenes from which all decent passers-by turned away in astonishment, as he heard and saw. He endured continuous contact with the wretches, and even their attentions, and thus the inevitable curse was conveyed to him, more and more and every minute. Helpless accomplice, he

shared the stolen money with them. Like them and with them, he was falling unchecked straight into perdition and the menace of eternity. Though he could not budge, he was descending into hell. In the depth of that corner wherein he was crucified, he wholly resembled his heart of those bygone days, when so often he breathed forth the sepulchral word: "Never!" He resembled a statue, superhumanly established, of Duty or of Shame.

THE ELEVENTH

THE Master, who had a pale head with long marble-like hair, and whose spectacles shone in solemnity, came to a standstill on his morning round opposite my little table at the door of Room 28, and condescended to announce to me that I was henceforth appointed to let in the ten poor people who every month were admitted to the hospitality of the House. Then he went on, so tall and so white among the assiduous flock of students that they seemed to be carrying a famous statuette from room to room.

I stammered the thanks which he did not hear. My 25-year-old heart felt a happy pride in reflecting that I had been chosen to preside in one of the noblest traditions of the House in which, a humble assistant, I was wandering lornly among wealthy invalids.

On the first day of every month the luxurious palace-hospital became the paradise of ten vagabonds. One of its outer doors was opened to admit the first ten who came, whoever they were, wherever they had fallen from or escaped. And for a whole month those ten human derelicts enjoyed the entire hospitality of the comfortable institution, just as much so as the Master's most valuable patients, as much as the archdukes and multi-millionaires. For them, too, were the lofty halls whose walls were not only white, but glistening, the huge corridors like covered streets,

which in summer or in winter had the coolness or the mildness of spring. For them also, the immense garden beds set among green velvet, like bunches of flowers so enlarged by magic that one walked among them. For them equally, the outer walls, far off but impassable, which shield one against wide-open Space, against rambling roads, against the plains which come to an end no more than the sky. For thirty days the refugees busied themselves only with doing nothing, only worked when they ate, and were no longer afraid of the unknown or of the coming day. They who were remorseful learned to forget things, and they who were bereaved, to forget people.

When by chance they met each other, they simply had to turn their heads away hurriedly. There was not in all the House, by order of the Master, a mirror in which they would have found their bad dream again. At the day's end came the dormitory, peaceful as a cemetery, a nice cemetery, where one is not dead, where one waits—where one lives, but without knowing it.

At eight o'clock on the first day of the following month all ten of them went away, cast back into the world one by one, as into the sea. Immediately after, ten others entered, the first ten of the file which, since the night before, had been washed up against the wall of the house as upon the shores of an island. The first ten, no more, no less, no favours, no exceptions, no injustices; one rule only—they who had already been were never again admitted. The arrivals were asked nothing else—not even for the confession of their names.

And on the first day of the month, as soon as nine o'clock had sounded, exactly together from the Anglican church and the Catholic chapel of the House, I opened the little Poor-door.

A crowd of beings was massed against the door-wing and the wall. Hardly had the former turned in the shadow when the tattered heap rushed forward as though sucked in.

My helper had to throw himself forward to enforce a little order upon the greedy invasion. We had to detach by force, to tear away from the mass each one of the besiegers, who were pressed side by side and elbow to elbow, fastened to each other like fantastic friends. The eight entered, the ninth, the tenth.

And then the door was quickly closed, but not so quickly that it prevented me from seeing, only a step from me, him upon whom it closed, the eleventh, the unlucky one, the accursed.

He was a man of uncertain age; in his grey and withered face lack-lustre eyes floated. He looked at me so despairingly that he seemed to smile. The touch of that extraordinary disappointment made me start, of that face that was mute as a wound. I glimpsed in a flash—the time that the door took to shut—all the effort he had made to get there, even if too late, and how much he too deserved to come in!

Then I busied myself with the others; but a few minutes later, still affected by the distress I had read on the face of the outcast, I half opened the door to see if he were still there. No one. He and the three or four others—uncertain rags that had fluttered behind him—had gone to the four winds of heaven,

carried away along the roads like dead leaves. A little shiver went through me, a shiver almost of mourning for the conquered.

At night, as I was falling asleep, my thoughts went again to them, and I wondered why they stayed there till the last moment, they who arrived only when ten had already taken their places at the door. What did they hope for? Nothing. Yet they were hoping all the same, and therein was a mean miracle of the heart.

We had reached the month of March. On the last day of the old month, towards nightfall, a rather frightened murmur crept from the side of the high road, close to the door. Leaning over a balcony, I could make men out there, stirring like insects. These were the suppliants.

The next morning we opened to these phantoms whom the magical story of the house had called across the world, who had awakened and unburied themselves from the lowest and most awful of depths to get there. We welcomed the ten who first came forward; we were obliged to drive back into life the eleventh.

He was standing, motionless, and offering himself from the other side of the door. I looked at him, and then lowered my eyes. He had a terrible look, with his hollow face and lashless eyelids. There breathed from him a reproach of unbearable artlessness.

When the door divided us for ever, I regretted him, and should have liked to see him again. I turned towards the others, swarming in gladness on the flagstones, almost with resignation, wondering at my own

firm conviction that the other, sooner than these, ought to have come in with us.

And it was so every time. Every time I became more indifferent to the crowd of admitted and satisfied, and devoted my gaze still more to him who was refused salvation. And every time he seemed to me the most pitiable case, and I felt that I was myself smitten in the person of the one condemned.

In June, it was a woman. I saw her understand and begin to cry. I trembled as I furtively scanned her; to crown all, the weeper's eyelids were blood-red as wounds.

In July, the appointed victim was incomparably regrettable by reason of his great age; and no living being was so compassionable as he who was repulsed the month after, so young was he. Another time, he who had to be snatched from the group of the elect besought me with his poor hands, encircled with the remains of frayed linen, like lint. The one whom Fate sacrificed the following month showed me a menacing fist. The entreaty of the one made me afraid, and the threat of the other pitiful.

I could almost have begged his pardon, the "eleventh" of October. He drew himself up stiffly; his neck was wrapped high in a greyish tie that looked like a bandage; he was thin, and his coat fluttered in the wind like a flag. But what could I have said to the unfortunate who succeeded him thirty days later? He blushed, stammered a nervous apology, and withdrew after bowing with tragic politeness—piteous remnant of an earlier lot.

And thus a year passed. Twelve times I let in the

vagrants whom the stones had worn out, the workmen for whom all work was hopeless, the criminals subdued. Twelve times I let in some of those who clung to the stones of the wall as on to reefs of the sea coast. Twelve times I turned others away, similar ones, whom I confusedly preferred.

An idea beset me—that I was taking part in an abominable injustice. Truly there was no sense in dividing all those poor folk like that into friends and enemies. There was only one arbitrary reason—abstract, not admissible; a matter of a figure, a sign. At bottom, this was neither just nor even logical.

Soon I could no longer continue in this series of errors. I went to the Master, and begged him to give me some other post, so that I should not have to do the same evil deed again every month.

THE BAD CUSTODIAN

NUMBER One was fat; Number Two was thin; Three was tall, and Number Four quite small.

These four numbers of the West Yard, who differed in appearance as much as four punctuation marks, had this in common—they had all been convicted for robbery at the county town court about Midsummer Day last. But their resemblance ended with the period of their conviction. Their respective crimes had been—were—as different as themselves, for the men had plundered, the one a rich foreigner, and the other a crowd of poor unimportant people; while the two women had committed the abominable deed, the one for love and the other in hatred. Nevertheless, the four did not know each other. Though so close, they were separated by the obdurate darkness of the partition walls, and neighboured each other no more than they who are side by side in the graveyards.

One being only saw them all, the gaoler, and a slender and colourless officer with grey hair and face, with a neck so thin and dry in the middle of his high cloth collar that it was like the stem of a potted plant, with dried-in eyes under a forehead as knobbly as a shingle beach. He was an old sailor; but in truth he was no longer anything, his mind not having sufficient expanse to be able to concern itself at the same time with

both the present and the past. His lips were always firmly joined together, and his features as rigid as those one sees chalked on doors.

Yet he stood or moved about like a survivor among the four intermittent and ludicrous travellers of the round yard; and such as he was, he was all they had in the world.

But he paid no attention whatever to the four successive derelicts. Not only did he not speak to them, but he thought of nothing at all as he watched them appear and then go round the yard for the appointed time, like hands round a clock-face.

Was it weakness of mind on his part? Yes; but it was above all because he believed that criminals are of a monstrous race, infinitely different from that of the rest, infinitely distant from them. The belief which centuries had heaped up in him was no more than a huge reproach, tranquil and silent, against those who had preferred Satan to integrity, those whom it was his business to keep out of the world. He knew that there was an indelible stain on the faces and hands of these mournful strangers. These criminals—worse still, these convicted people—who every morning came to life again from their cells for a quarter of an hour, had the look of human beings, but they were chiefly convicts. His eyes followed them as a matter of duty, but with a sort of blindness, as they made their daily eddy, slowly and sadly, at the foot of the brick walls.

He had just opened a cell one day. A grey shape had extracted itself and begun to walk in a circle,

flimsily and hurriedly, but hesitating, like a piece of paper in the wind.

Suddenly the gaoler felt a light little quiver in the back of his neck, and a tickling beginning in his eyes. Things looked as if they were rocking and capsizing.

"What the ——" he said.

His fingers relaxed, and the bunch of Keys fell down. The old sailor leaned against the wall. But there is no sort of inactivity to shield one against the vast tempest towards which one moves as fast as one lives. He felt himself falling, though he still remained standing, and although he shouted with all his strength, only a feeble groan came.

The prisoner walked on, nor did he see the gaoler; and when the walking-time was up, automatically he went in and fell back again in his compartment. Nothing remained in the paved courtyard but a buttressed shape with jerking hands.

They came at last. It was seen that something unusual was happening. The Keys were picked up, and the contents of the cells verified. When they came to the custodian, he roused himself, emerged at last from his dismal nightmare. He stammered heavily, quite wonder-struck. He let himself be led to the infirmary, dragging his feet.

Several days later, notwithstanding a general lowering of his faculties, the doctor calculated that the humble functionary had completely recovered from his attack—till the next came—and he resumed his duties. Nobody could remark the least change in him.

But nobody could see into him. He did not manage to wake up completely from the great and extraordi-

nary disorder, to extricate himself from the shipwreck into which he had reeled. He retained the stupor of his struggle and his saving. He retained, too, certain delirious visions, fixed in his eyes.

He had seen himself quite little again, as he was before he became ship's boy, before everything. Yes, by the chance of his brief vertigo and the commotion in his poor brain, he had glimpsed faces bent over him, a supernatural distance away.

He had seen one evening—many evenings—on the threshold of a door, a shade whose outstretched arms sought for him; and in a Kitchen, a dress, by which one was more peaceful than anywhere else. His father, his mother. They had come back a little to his side. And he had even seen again, in one dazzling moment, a feminine form almost as big as he was now, a form that was not his mother, that might have been his sister had she not been some one more divine and more incomprehensible.

Certainly he was beginning again to forget these details, so strangely re-born in a flash of madness; but there remained still some astonishment and hesitation. He was disturbed by the confused impression of all that he must have been.

When he began again to make the prisoners go round, one by one, he set about looking at them for the first time, those submerged uncertain shapes of the yard. The springtime sun was venturing on to the crest of the wall. Whether by reason of that glow or for some other miracle—behold, he *saw* them! He could not prevent himself from reflecting, at first timidly, that those had been men, and these, women.

And gradually the idea came to him that they had remained, after all, men and women.

Some things that he had never noticed, some details formerly invisible, absorbed his thoughts. These creatures began to assume shapes, in the eyes of that petrified face which a mysterious organic disorder had awakened and animated. And so they were still more unlike each other to him, still more lonely and abandoned.

He wanted to know their names. At the office they wrote them down for him on a scrap of paper. The big one was called Mesmer; the thin one, Bazire; the two women were Madame Popelin and *Mlle.* Cordibois. Enriched with this information, he asked a clerk what they had done, learned it off, and said it over to himself. As he saw each one of them, afterwards, he wondered at their crime; and then the more he saw of them, the less he wondered. Everything happens in the great earthly melodrama. He had really been little, himself, and had crawled between parents on whom Fate had long since been avenged!

As the taller of the two women was completing her last round, he planted himself in front of her. She stopped and straightened up, for she was walking bent forward towards the middle of the smaller yard, on account of her height. He opened his mouth to speak to her. Was she afraid he was going to bite her? She was seized with trembling, and stared at him in terror, with her neck awry and her eyes askew. As he did nothing, the long, weedy, and emaciated face began to twitch; and she smiled. He also smiled. At that moment some church clocks chimed faintly.

He saw her flicker, and make a grimace. She sniffed, stifling a sob. Then she looked at him with tears in her eyes. He felt that there were in his also, and that they had actually given look for look.

The other woman was tiny as a toy. He looked at her and so attentively that, just as she was coming in, she turned towards him. Standing out against the shadows of the cell, he saw her pallid face and its red cheek-bones and eyelids, a face all scarred and sore. She guessed the weightiness of the silent moment that followed, for instead of saying any casual thing to him, she simply said, in a very low voice, "I've no grudge against you."

"Ah!" he said.

She tossed her head, then lowered it, smiled and blushed, and added at last, "I'm sorry——"

"So am I," he murmured grandly.

There was never more between them than those few great words. For that very day he corrected himself with a violent shock. He passed a terrible night of fright at the thought of what he had done.

So he was forgetting his duty, prowling round the accursed so as to draw nearer them! He was becoming a wretch to whom the difference between good and evil was fading away, a madman who looked for innocence and even for resemblance into the most infamous of people!

Accusingly he struck his forehead and contracted his dry hand upon his heart—the heart which was coming back to life so beautifully. Stretched on his pallet, he saw himself as an evil-doer, henceforth incapable of understanding anything.

"I can't—I can't rely on myself any more."

But even while he groaned, he could not help opening his eyes wide, as if in a supreme appeal, in the night that was full of secret and infinite things, the night that was contrary to law.

THE CROSS OF HONOUR

IT was with a fine surprise stroke that we got into the village of Karakou—or some such name. There were only women, children, and old men in it. All the fighting men of the Lolobes—it was something like that that these marmosets called themselves, but I don't vouch for it—had by chance gone away hunting that evening.

We crept close up to the central space without giving the alarm, thanks to the heavy twilight and to the fact that one of our men prudently felled a buffoon whose wrinkled face was like an old polished shoe, and who, squatting near the enclosure, believed he was guarding the village.

Hidden behind huts, we loaded and propped up our rifles, so as to shoot down all those unsuspecting shadows, some sitting on stones or on the ground, others going and coming.

Opposite me, on a seat against a wall, two blackamoors were sitting, motionless and silent, and quite close to each other; and even while I took aim at the one on the right, I wondered what they might be saying to each other.

The signal! From everywhere at once, the thunder of our rifles burst forth. It was not a long job. All those inky silhouettes were sent to Kingdom-come in-

side two minutes. They seemed to plunge into the ground, or fly away, or scatter like smoke.

Certainly, we then despatched rather roughly, I admit, the few survivors who had escaped our salvo and had gone to earth in their huts like field-mice. This violence, so natural and humane in time of war, was condoned by the joy of victory, and because we were drunk, having discovered in the principal hut a barrel of rum, sold to the Lolobes in question by some miserable English agent. As for exonerating myself, I must say that I have only retained an extremely confused recollection of what then came to pass. Yes—there is one detail concerning the two savages who were facing me while I was fixing my rifle and selecting one of them. I saw them again; indeed, I almost fell on them. They were hardly more than a single corpse at the foot of the seat on which, a moment before, they had been so funnily quiet together. They were a negro and a negress, rigidly clasping each other, like two hands. Two lovers! The matter stuck in my brain in spite of myself, so much so that I could not help joking about it several times during that historic evening.

Then my memory capsizes—the orgy, our shouts and dances, our grimaces and antics; and suddenly a sharp pain in my skull—I am falling—and remember no more.

I did not come to my senses until six weeks later in the hospital at St. Louis. I opened my eyes one morning upon white surroundings, and a smell of iodoform.

Then they told me, in little doses, what had happened. Our column had recklessly lingered in the

conquered village, and slept on the spot. So the Lolobe warriors, returning, had massacred the lot of us, all, to the last man.

"And what about me?" I said.

They explained that a chance had saved me—the collapse of a hut that had stunned but hidden me. The next day the main force had retaken and razed the village, had killed all the Lolobes at last, and had dragged me feet first out of the protecting débris.

But there was better still. The Governor had been to my bedside to announce to me himself that I had been appointed a Knight of the Legion of Honour.

All my comrades killed and myself decorated! I fell asleep that day in emotion unutterable and beatitude unmingled.

I was not long in getting well—I was in such a hurry to go home with the cross I had won! I dreamed dreams in which I saw the airs they would all give themselves—father, mother, and neighbours. My quondam friends, still only paltry devils, would not dare to speak to me; and the foremen at the factory would cotton to me. Who knew, even, if the wealthy *Mlle.* Mounier, in spite of her old age, would not consent to marry me!

The day so long awaited arrived. It was a morning in July when I alighted at Villeneuve, with one trailing leg and my head held high, with my old great-coat and my new cross.

What a reception, gentlemen! The station was full of music. There was a row of girls, the little ones in their first-communion attire, and the big ones like brides, with flags and bunches of flowers. A man, en-

circled by a little frock-coat and red as a turkey-cock, challenged me while I was still on the footboard, and Monsieur the Count de Vilvert, to whom the castle belonged and who was in sporting costume, smiled at me. People jostled and pushed each other, saying, "There he is!" just as they say "Long live the King!" And in the crowd my parents were expanding, unrecognisable in their Sunday clothes.

They led me away to lunch at the Town Hall. There were speeches before, and speeches after, and all of it was only about me. They called me "the glorious survivor of Karakou" and the "hero of Senegal." They related my exploit in twenty different ways, with a certain trick of mixing into it at the same time some things about France and civilisation.

Towards evening, when the luncheon was nearing its end and people were calming down, a reporter came up to my chair and asked me to relate to him myself, for his newspaper, all the fine things I had done.

"Ah, well," I said, "there was—I—I have——"

But I could find nothing to add to this preface, and could only look at him and gape.

My arm, which was gesticulating in space, came to a standstill. "I can't remember any more!" I was forced to confess.

"Well answered!" yelped the chap, "the brave fellow is not even pleased to recall his prowess!"

I smiled, and we rose from the table. There was yet a procession to the end of the village, palavers, and liqueur of honour, presented by Papa Barbat. Then, after huge embracings, we scattered. Finally, I found myself alone at dusk, near the factories.

I took then the road that goes round the church, in order to go home. Although night was falling, my dazzled eyes blinked, and my feet were terribly heavy. My mind was empty and wandering—and yet something was troubling me.

Yes, the newspaper-maker's ridiculous question was forcing itself into my poor skull like a nail—"What fine thing have you done?" Yes, what, after all, what? Evidently I had done extraordinary things—the cross was proof—but what? I stopped suddenly in the middle of the darkened road, and remained there; searching, and sighing to find nothing.

Had they, with all their champagne and their complicated arguments, had they muddled my thoughts? However it was, I was like those people in novels who forget a piece of their life. I had clean forgotten my brilliant action, and it looked to me as if it were no longer anything at all.

Uneasily, I resumed my walk home.

Then it was I perceived in the twilight, on a seat by a farmhouse, two beings sitting close together. They must have been clasping hands, and they were saying nothing; but they seemed to apply themselves to this mutual silence as to an occupation of importance. In the obscurity of evening I could see nothing of them, except that they had human shape, and that they were exchanging something better than words.

"Ah!" I said, stopping once more.

And immediately, with my eyes fixed on that dark corner of the village, I saw another village, one destroyed now, wiped out with all its inhabitants, and above all with the two black creatures who had

throbbed together before me, revealing to me only their human shape, and their interwoven silence. And that black couple exactly resembled, through the night's simplification, the two shadows here.

These shadows, those negroes; it was really stupid to see an analogy,—but I saw it. When one has drunk too much, he becomes almost innocent and simple of understanding. And I must indeed have been drunk, for instead of making me laugh, the comical comparison made me cry. My hand went to my cross; I took it away from my breast and hid it, quickly, in the bottom of my pocket, like something stolen.

SAAR

SAAR was the finest of the big greyhounds of the North. No other displayed as he did the clean magnificent lines of that race which to-day has disappeared, after being the noblest that went upon the earth save only the royal race of man. Some traces of what the stirring sight of him may have been remained for a long time among the coursers of Eastern Scythia and those which grow ever inordinately bigger among the eternal snow that covers the Isles of Tin, Caledonia, and fabled Persia, and even in the species of curved and long-drawn canine which the flaming climate of Libya has contracted and stiffened into arches.

He had fierce eyes, which were jet-black in daylight, and became a more and more costly sapphire as night was falling. He would run in circles round a galloping horse. Birds only escaped him by rising straight up into the sky; and when he leaped, his effort was so quiet that it seemed as if the earth itself was rising to throw the wonderful projectile forward.

He knew how to take care of the woolly flocks of the seafaring traders. This occupation was a sort of obscure religion to him, and he observed it without a falter, under the calm eye of the sovereign shepherd who gave him his food. Confined in the farthest

pastures of the peninsula, he dwelt there and endured the malignant moisture of the morning and the snares of the night-time—he who might have overtaken the sun and mown down all distances with the great scythe of his head and his slender sword-like legs.

That year the winter began terribly. The rains were such that in many places the layer of earth and its verdant down slid off the flanks of the coast, and one saw the bones of the land arise.

The shepherd and the dog continued regularly to rescue the flock from famine, and while the pallid, terror-struck sheep sought for the drowned grass, both of them remained on their feet, the man planted like a sacred monolith, the dog like a doorway, a little way from the twisted tree whose shelter they avoided, knowing that the lightning aimed at it.

One night something appalling came to pass. At the distance of a shout from the palisade where the flock was sheltering, the flood of the tormented sea submerged the natural roadway which connected the pastures with the mainland. The sea established itself on that steep-ridged pass, and there remained nothing of it, around the new abyss, save an indistinct jawbone of reefs, whose half-drowned crests decoyed little hollow whirlpools with each backwash of the tide. That night the tempest roared so loudly that Saar thought he was being called. He sprang forward, fiercely assaulted by the storm, towards the shelter where the one master used to sleep. He caught a glimpse of him, sticking fast to a rock in the middle of the blackened, raging azure of the night. Then suddenly, without the dog's knowing why, the man

plunged into the abyss, his cloak rioting about him, as though he was taking wings into the bowels of the earth.

Big Saar waited, his muscles so tense that the rock was held as in the hand of a god; and the rain, beating on his sides, made the same sound as in falling on stone.

Dawn came, hardly tempering this second Deluge. The wind drove clouds of rain along the level of the ground, like flames. Saar lowered his pointed bear's head, and began to run about, whining and questing. He found nothing but the overflowing of the sea, mingled with the enormous absence of the master.

Then as daylight took supremacy, and since the hours irresistibly bring actions, he drove the sheep out from the enclosure where they huddled in terror on the sponge-like soil against the partitions, now sticky with mud. He steered them towards the fields at the extremity of the promontory—changed into an island, now that the land had been conquered by the sea.

He utilised, as formerly, the effective words of command that one makes by barking. For instructions of urgency, he mingled the various sounds that the long and flexible throat of the northern greyhound is capable of producing. He scolded. He went in one jump over the flock to hustle into the right direction a sheep that was unconsciously attracted by the sinister slopes.

The climbing of the last undulation was rough work. He had to direct a hard battle with the wind, which hurled itself on the mass of timid woolly balls, shook them, and tried to scatter them in all directions.

Stubbornly, however, one by one, the dog reconstructed a complete flock out of the defaulting horde, by force of enfolding them within that speed that was like a cord.

In this way the humble, bleating travellers—sole inhabitants of this corner of the world, henceforth torn from the remainder—arrived at their bourne, the field of the day before.

Each ewe, each wether, each lamb lowered its head and munched the grass. Saar lay down apart, as usual, looking beyond the pale creatures whose indolent lot was woven into his own.

Then a dull feeling inside him forced him to think, and he reflected that he was hungry.

He set himself to wait imperiously for his master, for him whose high, flat face shone more than anything, momentous as the moon.

No one. Only the time went by, and that did not let itself be seen. At a moment when a feeble gleam blanched the drowned dome of the sky, the big dog got up, dissatisfied and empty, confused by the desire for food and drink.

As the succeeding hours only worsened that internal wound, he moved about, yawned, and shivered. At last he uttered a plaintive cry, a cry of appeal, a command to his master to help him. After that prayer, he waited for the answer which should grant it. The answer did not come, his master being no longer in a place where one can hear the cry even of an abandoned friend. No doubt, in some Valhalla where one quaffs sunshine, he was guarding ideal flocks with an ex-

traordinary dog. So he no more came than a god comes into his temple.

When Saar discovered that his cry had been in vain, that the master would not obey it, he risked another call. He heard Hunger murmuring and singing to itself in his sides; languidly he turned his great head towards that naked voice. Then, whether by way of caressing himself, whether to appease and console the flesh that so highly deserved to be satisfied, he licked the tense coat on the curved grating of his ribs.

The evening, however, was indicating that it was above all necessary to return. For a dog impressed with the duty of guarding living things, the end of the day constitutes a command just as insuperable as that of the morning. Saar collected the flock, and with the same efforts as at dawn, the same distracted attentions, he drove it in and set it cuddling against their nocturnal palings.

Saar fell asleep. He dreamed that he had a wolf by the throat. He woke up to the sound of the queer muffled outcries of his nightmare. He stood up, arched the spine that was notched like a mountain chain, and then suddenly disappeared in the night—to look for a wolf.

But there was nothing stirring in the island. Only could one feel passing in the air—sterilised by the briny cold—the mad comings and goings of winds and gales.

All at once he stood still; his ears stiffened like those of a horse, and his eyes blazed madly. But, still more quickly, he breathed out a gentle little howl, and ran

back to his sheep, whose scent he had picked up *in mistake.*

The next day he began his task again—a still more severe and heroic task, for his belly was falling in, his eyes were reddening, and his tongue drooped from his gaping mouth.

But he could not, all the same, remain inactive. He trotted unresting, as light in his passage over the grass-broidered earth as a dry leaf that the breeze leads in a garden. Once, aloof from the others—the eaters—he extended his slim jaws with their white teeth towards a blade of grass. But when he had informed himself of the insipid and worthless taste of the green stem, he left off chewing it, and kept it, wet with the foam of his spittle, in his half-open mouth.

And on the evening of the third day, bristling with emaciation, his flint-like sinews protruding from the rock of his bones, he looked with hatred on the indolent and cloudy creatures that he was tending. And still he could not help protecting them; he had done it so much and so long. There was a booming vibration in his skull, and he saw flashes of light under his blinking eyelids.

At dawn on the fourth day he could hardly tear himself out of the muddy soil and the sleep that bore him down. He would only have had the strength to act if the living prey of which he was so tragically destitute had appeared to him. But since the only living things were his flock, he stayed enshrouded in the ground, and dropped one weak word to announce that he could do no more. Towards the evening he closed at last his beautiful, queenly eyes, and laid for

ever on the dark earth the head that was pointed like a promontory.

Long months after, when the floods withdrew and men hauled in to the island, they saw on the ransacked pastures, stripped of the last blade of grass, the white carcases of the sheep. They were like the frames of boats, scattered here and there in the builder's yard, their sides bristling with curved timbers. A huge skeleton like that of an ocean-going ship dominated the others. That was the big dog, who had been the first to die of hunger, in the middle of the sheep.

THE GREAT DEEDS OF LANTURLU

THE slender silhouette of the leading rider became at last perceptible in the sunny distance. Several cries burst forth, here and there, from the stand that was bedecked with uniforms, and then they melted into one shout—"It's Gentil on Lanturlu! Bravo, Lanturlu!"

And, in fact, so it was. Carrying his young and elegant master like an ornament, the splendid horse finished the race in a trot of marvellous suppleness, while his rivals were still only dots of dust on the horizon. In front of the official stand he stopped abruptly, and his bronze figure reared so admirably that he might have been a fixture on a pedestal.

The grand stands shook and overflowed. The choicest of the spectators—ladies in beautiful bright colours, officers in beautiful dark colours, civilians colourless but illustrious—surrounded the victors. The women, even the most elevated, even the prettiest, betrayed agitation. Their eyes went towards the lieutenant—who was rather pale, and dangling a smile to right and to left—but their gloved hands fluttered like butterflies on the shining metallic neck of Lanturlu. The general, especially resplendent in the heart of the principal group, took a step in front of the senators and diverse councillors, opened his mouth, congratulated the officer, and then paid homage to the horse,

addressing himself to its natural representative, the rider.

When, led bridled but respectfully, the animal went from the Champ-de-Mars, where his victory had been established, to the École Militaire, where his box was —henceforth historical—when he went forward between two human embankments that bristled with gaping faces, cameras, and glances swift but ineffaceable, he was welcomed with such an ovation that he seemed to understand and to be listening confusedly. Although his legs were trembling a little, his breast-strap foam-splashed, and his eyes dazzled, he braced his muscles, arched and lightened his steps, and made his beautiful lines glisten.

In the depth of the wooden quadrangle that a narrow triangle of light burst into, in the depth of the darksome thoughts in which he dwelt submerged, conscious only of shapeless fragments of pictures and vague scraps of sound, the animal mused on the impression of a great effort mingled with a great reward. The while his long teeth were snatching at the hay, the horse felt—yes, he felt flickering in the vice of his humble skull the understanding that he had patiently and heroically obeyed his orders, that he had given, as was necessary, his strength and his toil, that he had given supernatural satisfaction.

Lanturlu's victory had been easy, although the conditions of the race had been particularly severe. People had even found fault with the immoderate length of the last stage, the one in which the victor had scattered all his rivals broadcast behind him on the road from the East.

In those days the lieutenant his master was perfectly happy, and so was his young wife. And their little Maurice, who was born on exactly the same day as Lanturlu, three years before, set up a little pinkness on his pale and delicate face.

Eventually the champion appropriated the Coupe du Centre. This time he found more difficulties in his way, and he had to put out an enormous expense of energy to beat Kali, M. de St. Aulaine's filly, by a length.

Two years went by. His master had to admit that the horse, in spite of his breeding, could no longer figure in the big ordeals. He was still famous, by reason of his two championships; but it was his name, it was no longer he, that was glorified. He passed into the squadron, falling to the lot of a man who was like so many others by the absence of stripes; and now he was only called Turlu. "He's a famous horse!" the adjutant announced to the admiring recruits, in the first year. "He's been a famous horse," remarked some one two years after, who remembered the fact because Turlu, following on a wearying round in the clay, had distinguished himself by a sort of resurrected fire, an incomparable final rush.

The time arrived when, after a sort of judgment, after some removals and imprisonments in new stables, they harnessed him to a cab. Still vigorous, in spite of his ten years fully completed, he trotted cheerfully through one season, and then another.

But age, that mournful malady which insufficient nourishment was aggravating, began to make continuous work arduous for him.

The old champion still found, in snatches, enough of the headstrong spirit of his noble race, of the exasperated impulses of his "blood," to carry mean errands in the labyrinthine streets through to the end. To reach some dismal carriage-drive, he was now more tenaciously wilful and heroically obstinate than he had once been to trample the virgin sand around the winning-post and the judges' stand.

His name, handed down carelessly and without interest, had disappeared. His driver did not know it; so that Lanturlu was really no longer anybody.

So many days fell on him then that in the long run they bruised and wounded him, just as definitely as blows. His body got out of shape and his movements became ridiculous. His bones showed themselves more and more; his skin was worn out in places, and even bled. In spite of himself, he forgot how to gallop, and only trotted by fits and starts—during unexpected little spasms of aggressive enthusiasm, of sportive madness, which then left him astounded, so that he hopped about on the rank.

Soon, harness-gripped and whip-worried, entangled in the intricacy of the streets, there was not left him enough of all the desperate physical obstinacy bequeathed him by his pure ancestral line to walk with a regular step as long as they wanted him to, to defend himself daily against frightful weariness, to reach the end of the day.

One morning they did not harness him; but a man arrived and bought him, and took him away, saying to the grinning ostlers, "We'll try and get a bit more

use out of him. I shall get my money's worth back all right."

The horse was attached to a truck that slid on rails, near a quarry. The truck almost went by itself, and the work was really not work at all.

And yet, as early as the second hour, the animal came to a stop between the rails, as much the prisoner of the little vehicle as if it had had the roots of a wall! He shook and danced on his folded feet, cracked by the endless and inevitable toil. They shouted at him. He stiffened himself, trembling; his eye sparkled, and fixed as if—shipwrecked in the stormy earth of the embankment, he struggled to move forward. And he did! When the truck, at the end of a few yards, came to the hole where it would be emptied, the horse had performed the most admirably sporting feat he had ever done even in the historical and brilliant days of his career. This one, in truth, was his obscure and glorious record!

And yet this was not his most magnificent exploit. He showed himself still braver and stronger three days later, for a few minutes; although, during those minutes, he was carrying nothing, dragging nothing, and a man was even pulling him along.

But he could no longer walk; the mere job of moving himself had at last become beyond his strength.

And so—just when there happened to go by, in the alley and quite near him, a four-striped officer with a full-blown and charming lady, neither of whom knew him any more than he could know them, just in the middle of that brief and tragic occurrence that no one knew of—he stopped dead in the street.

By jerks his head drew nearer to the dark ground, to all the darkness that the yawning chasms of his great eyes were gazing at, and that he saw, blindly. He was subsiding gently. He was going to yield to the weight—the fearful weight—of himself, against which his part on earth had been to struggle increasingly, the weight which was now drawing the whole of him towards the ground, into the ground.

"Gee up!" growled the dealer.

Then, at the eternal master's call, at man's divine command, all the pugnacious fire and all the fierce hatred for obstacles of which he was made up, all the fatal necessity of reaching the end, started to life. The noble horse tore himself from his supineness, made one step, two steps away from nothingness, continued to go.

While thus he was staggering, forward and upright, he heard droning through the poor mad brain that the narrow coffin of his skull enclosed, something like a storm of applause.

And so, sublimely and by a sort of miracle recreating his utterly finished strength, at the end of his life contriving a new one, as prodigious as a statue that walks away, he passed through the porch of the slaughterhouse.

THE MIRACLE

IT was in the open street and the open sunshine. In expansive merriment, two little girls were sitting on the seat of golden stone placed against the golden house.

They shook with laughter; they were laughing themselves hoarse. They had hair like tangled black silk, shining eyes, and mouths as little and as moist as pomegranate seeds.

"There's been a miracle, and I've seen it," asserted Tomasita, with all the force of her bird-like voice.

"A miracle? And you saw it?" Conchita's voice said, still more shrilly, as she straightened her little bare neck, like a rosy collar, and raised her tiny orange-coloured hands with their thin and entirely black nails.

Tomasita, who had eleven times in her life seen the month of May begin and end, again called the most spotless Madonna to witness that she had seen a miracle.

In face of such obstinacy, Conchita could only half shut her eyes and half open her mouth, in expectation of supernatural explanations.

"It was one day—just imagine—yes, it was a very sad thing—there had been——"

Embarrassed by the super-preciousness of the story, assailed by all there was to say of the matter, the

child did not know how to begin. She shut her mouth and wrinkled her forehead. She made a big effort, among all the first words, to select some.

"She was a beautiful woman, my dovekin. She was called Dolores, Dolores Malloca. But it's nothing to tell her name! One *can't* know how pretty she was, without seeing her. She seemed to shine.

"I've told you, haven't I, that she came to stay with us—at Llassa, on the other side of the Mansanilla. At Llassa it's like here, but it's whiter and redder—it's like here if all the days were Sundays.

"Her husband Daniel had gone on a journey for all the summer. She'd come to us because of that, and she was as beautiful as angels. She was so beautiful that when she was coming I didn't dare go near her, and when I was with her, I daren't go away. But she was very different from other women—I told you, didn't I? She was serious—too serious. She didn't say much, only when it was necessary, and I believed for a long time that she couldn't laugh. She had lots of dresses. Well, at Easter she put on a grey dress."

"A grey dress!"

"Yes, she wore a grey dress on purpose. I know why she was like that. It's because her husband was a long way off, and wouldn't come back till after the summer. She was thinking about him, and she used to talk about him. One day she was murmuring some sentences like one says a prayer—and I saw that the sentences were chaplets, made out of his name. If you spoke to her about anything else, she looked at you for a minute, with eyes as big as a mouth, before understanding and answering. Yes, it's because he

wasn't there that she was sad, and wouldn't like red and blue, nor violet, nor anything."

"And then?" said Conchita, whose eyes were setting off her high colour like two drops of dew on the pert face of a rose.

"And then there were two other things; the first, that she went on being sad, and that it was too much, and nobody understood it at all. And the other thing was, that my brother Nemecio was gone on her, and that he was looking for her always, and wanted her."

"Ah!" said Conchita, and she heard, lisping, in the obscurity of her flesh too young and her life too little, the eternal story of love.

"And she was more and more serious, more and more white and silent, because of the absence of master Daniel. It was like a little dead body in her, and a little mourning on her. It was a disease of meekness that was wearing her away. Even in the morning, when the day seems to make promises, or at noon, when the country breathes in your face, or along the street when it's as hot as anybody, and even when the evening's leaning on you, she used to go, wrapped up in her idea like a nun, without seeing anything, or touching anything, or tasting anything.

"And Nemecio was very miserable. He rolled wild eyes, and bit his fingers. He hid in corners like a dog that's hurt. One day when I went up to him, and he didn't see me because I'm little, I saw that he was sobbing, and all his face streaming, as if his heart was really bleeding.

"Another time, he was talking to her, and I was behind. I saw his back and it was moving, and I saw

her, all straight and stiff like one of those ghosts that seem like a long veil. He said to her, loud, 'I wish you hated me!'

"She said nothing, not even 'No!' A minute after I saw her face—a statue—*worse* than a statue—like the Madonna in the church, when you ask her for something, you know.

"So then I understood what was the matter. There was a spell—yes, there was an evil spell that her husband had cast on her when he went away. If she was so cold, and still, and foreign, it's because he'd forbidden her, the sorcerer that he was, to come out of remembering him. Then, you understand, dearie, she *couldn't* think except about him, and she'd got the secret of how not to smile at my brother when he was crying quite close to her."

"And then, did the wicked Daniel come back?"

"No, not yet; listen: Then she went to the arena with us. She followed us in the gala like a white shadow, with her eyes open, and her mind always taken up with the witchcraft of her husband.

"She sat down on one of the rows of seats, and made quite a big part of the crowd more lovely. She had let herself look forward, pale and lonely among all those people so happy and red with the sun—she looked like the moon as a lady. I was near her, and I watched her not moving.

"But all of a sudden she trembled.

"There was some blood in the arena. The bull was a bad beast, and they'd punished him with the goads. Blood was running from his nose, like a ribbon.

"Then she watched, her eyes open with all their might. She leaned forward and stretched out, so as to see, and see more still. Conchinetta, she was coming to herself, she was waking up, at last, waking up!

"A moment after, a horse was knocked down, and the sun showed up its stomach, that was gored open. Then, when all the women got up and clapped their hands, she too, she turned into a woman again like the others, and got up and began to cry out.

"When it came to the death-stroke, she said in a choked voice, 'How far off we are, how far off we are!'

"And when the espada's sword went in, I saw her trembling hand, fine as silk, seizing and squeezing Nemecio's arm, and she called him by his name, in a voice like singing. She wasn't the same woman when she got back, because she was like the others. The spell was broken. She was rescued, she was rescued! Wasn't that a miracle of the Holy Virgin?"

"Yes," said Conchita.

She sighed, and her eyes wandered. Then, in envious rapture, she said, "There'll come a day when I, too, I shall go mad, like the others!"

"Yes, some day, you—and me!"

Their faces became more prettily pink, their lips more deeply red. They held their peace, in the same obscure silence; they lowered the lids over their bright eyes. They shut their eyes up like the jewels that one puts away for the grand galas of the future. It seemed as if from that very moment they began to wait for the universal emotion to seize upon them in

their turn; as if, like two bunches of grapes, they were exposing their two young selves to the sun, which ripens little maids in their flesh and in their hearts.

THE OTHER WORLD

EVERY time he went to fetch the slain bull, trotting behind the two bell-adorned mules, he saw in a flash the arena and the rising tiers of spectators.

It was a brief and blinding escape out of the bull-den under the stands where for the rest of the show and of his existence he laboured, where he only straightened his bent back on the challenge of the death-cry.

The old man had almost been born in that gloomy retreat where the bellowing bulls were gathered like storm-clouds in the night, the den whose doors slid open under the grand stand, opposite the mountains of spectators.

His passion for the great national game had driven him there as soon as he had found his childish feet.

Through the frantic crowds he used to pick his way, an impetuously silent youngster, like a pickpocket. Between two agitated backs, beyond the enthralled and crimson face of an old man or that of some pale and shining young girl, his eyes espied the torero, gesticulating in his flaming cape.

In those days he had dreamed of being a torero, too. An orphan, he had dreamed it all by himself, and he told himself about it in a low voice as soon as his companions were no longer there to force him to play, and prevent him from listening to himself. When

his arms had gathered strength, he prowled about the sacred buildings and begged for a situation there. He was taken among the drovers and drudges, the men whose faces were like terra cotta, the lower half coloured blue by the razor.

He crept from one occupation to another, up to the bull-den, on the very edge of the arena, underneath the enormous assemblies that one sometimes saw completely shaking, like an earthquake.

He would never be a torero. They told him so; and then he saw it himself. He was growing up badly. Massive and sturdy. He was developing the wrong way. He bore his solid shoulders like an awkward burden, and one of his heavy hands swung lower than the other. The Devil, further, who thinks of everything, had put on his face an ugliness which grew bigger and more obtrusive with age. This ugliness first provoked little girls to loud laughter, and then bigger ones to little exclamations. It was a matter of general discussion, a subject for the tender discourse of lovers. One spoke of it as one did of bad weather. When the good incumbent of La Roche met the menial of the bull-den, the priest bowed his head, somehow ashamed.

How, in such case, was it possible that he could ever become one of those whose sword made red and resplendent as a bonfire the bull in the sunshine?

He resigned himself to obscure vegetation in the hole whence the brute emerged, invincible, where it fell, vanquished. The immense disillusion gave him no pain; his mind had gradually ceased to progress. His somnolent thoughts were not capable of con-

structing internal dramas. He forgot how to hope, and then how to regret. But he had preserved his youthful worship of the arena. It sufficed him to live quite close to it, in the shadow of its sunshine, to appear for a few minutes, after each death-blow, in the middle of the plaza's crater.

The enclosure still rang with the applause hurled down to the espada when he attached the draught-rope to the bull to take it away from the battlefield, and he picked up like crumbs the last shouts of the victors around the last silence of the fallen beast.

Time went by. The obscure and deformed super of the formal ceremony, of the sumptuous sacrifice, hardly left the den where he was buried like a root. He continued to grow old and be ugly. His eyes blinked and shed tears when he went into the light; and his cheeks and chin, once grimy, covered themselves with a grey powder.

Nothing had happened in his life. Nothing? Yes, one thing, or rather one person—a very little girl, who looked at him from a long, long way off.

There had been a little girl, dainty as a jewel, that he had held in his hands, on his knees, for a little while—one season, perhaps, or two seasons, of the bull-fights—and with her little violet eyes that made her different from everybody, which caused her so much to be pointed out, she looked at *him*.

Twenty years had gone by since the child had slipped through his fingers and gone away to the other world.

The coming of the frail being lent to him by fate had been preceded by a jumbled nightmare, full of cries, full of a woman's sobs. He had no longer

dared to think of that woman—through fear, or caution, through some holy or base feeling, or through poverty of mind, and soon he was no longer capable of it; but he had never prevented the childish face from looking at him from the depths of death, from smiling expressly at him. So that now he only saw that image when, retired to his hole in the evening, he closed his eyes, or when in the middle of the night he opened them.

And this was the limit of his future, of the resurrection of his heart. More years went by. He was still, as always, exclusively devoted to his duty as keeper of the huge victims; and he remained consecrated in his heart to the soft picture of her who was like the Madonna and the child Jesus at one and the same time, since she was a little girl.

At last his ears hardened, his broad back took the curve of a vault. When he came out, in order to conclude the resplendent tragedy of the arena, his head turned more painfully towards the multitude staged like gardens on the tiers, and he heard more indistinctly the scraps of shouting that bespattered him. Did he, perchance, imagine, in those days when the universal light around him was slowly decreasing, that the glory of the arena was dwindling among the multitude grown old? Yet the spectators remain eternally young, and belief in battles with the beasts is more and more deeply anchored in the depths of the human body.

One day his head weighed him down more than ever, and he felt himself drunk with darkness as he

came forward into the sheet of sunlight with unsteady steps.

The bull? He looked for it with his hand shading his eyes. He saw it and guided towards the helpless mass his coupled animals, with the hook dangling behind them.

There they stopped. The mules shook themselves. The roars of the crowd had not yet died out, and suddenly at a gesture of the espada they were renewed.

At this moment the old man realised that everything was turning upside down around him. He tottered, tried madly to catch hold of space, his arms beating like wings; he fell forward.

He fell in such a way that his head struck the ground quite close to the monster's muzzle, quite close to the enormous head which projected from the sand of the arena like a dark reef. As he did not try to rise, nor even think of it, nor even know who he was, the man looked wildly at the head of the wild beast.

It was not yet quite dead, but it was dying. The great eye, enormously open, like a deep wound—oh, so deep!—was troubled and dull. And the passivity of that head, soon to be mingled with all the nothingness that ever was and will be, seemed to the miserable man, whose head was brought equally low, as something immense and fantastic. He was dazzled by a sort of terrible and measureless proof of the profundity of a living being—proof which one only discerns on the shore of this world, as though it were in another. He did not deign to notice that they were pulling him away, and feeling him. He had the time, in a thrill of supernatural emotion, to feel surprised how

blind men are to all that life means. Life—Death. Murder is an uncommon and easy miracle. The drover's frightened eyes, as they lifted him up, were seeking, seeking and settling on those others, so equally, so divinely frightened, as if he had discovered all in them. And it is in that simplicity of our death, of the death of all of us, that his feeble spirit passed away.

Far from the golden track where a new bout was making ready, they laid him on some straw.

"He is dead," said the elegant doctor.

This doctor was rather in a hurry, like all young people. The old man's throat was still trembling with the echo of a rattle that one might have heard by stooping over him. His heavy lips were gurgling in a clumsy effort to hold the last breath back.

And all in a beautiful light, very different from the light of this world, his eyes saw a darling little girl with violet eyes, who was trying to put her embracing little arms round the big head of a bull.

THE BROTHER

THE village of Resat is cut in two by the valley of the Gueusine. Out of the twenty-four pinkish roofs scattered in this lean corner of Auvergne, a dozen pile themselves up on the grassy side of the ravine and the other dozen on the bald side. If any would venture to cross from one bank to the other, the odds are on his losing his footing and rolling from rock to rock down to the bed where the Gueusine extends itself.

It is human enough that the two groups of inhabitants, divided by the gulf as nations are by distance or by the hideous significance of frontiers, do not like each other.

But there were two, especially, who looked askance at each other across the ferocious cavity where the Gueusine is let loose—Jacquinot and Quinquin. Their houses exactly faced each other. One of the men had a face yellow and moist as mastic, and the other a beaming face, very brightly coloured, which diverted the children.

It was related that a close friendship had united them formerly—one too good to last. One of them grew jealous; that was Jacquinot. From him proceeded the hatred. Quinquin hardly did more than follow suit and hate in his turn, resignedly—or stupidly, if you like.

So an untiring enmity separated these two people. Their duel consisted in trying to grow richer than the other. That was enough. The success of either affected the other like a defeat.

Luck was equal at first. In the autumn of '92 Jacquinot bought The Établies meadow; but '93 had not yet shown itself when Quinquin retorted by the purchase of the Mansour slope. Several years later Jacquinot had not had time to enjoy his acquisition of a cow, a prolific milch-cow, fair and white, when Quinquin became the possessor of an ass, called Rémi.

From that time things changed, because Quinquin changed. Former instincts of dreaminess and idleness stole into him. He began by attaching himself too much to this Rémi, who had coarse grey hair, infinitely sensitive ears, and a look of probity.

The fonder he became of his obscure companion, the less vigour he put into struggling, economising, scourging himself with work, and getting more money than Jacquinot.

The latter, on the other hand, did not lay down his weapons for the satisfaction of his bellicose intent. His vigour and his avarice brought their harvest. When Marie Pesard's corner was sold by auction—it was splendid soil, through having been dunged for fifty years—Jacquinot got it.

In spite of this rude shock, which might have awakened a dead man, a magic spell of indulgent inertia took possession of Quinquin. He smiled at passers-by like a drunkard, or at the ass Rémi like a madman. He talked when he was all alone, or,

worse still, he addressed himself to Rémi, in order to make him wag his serious head.

From time to time he went out with no intention of working; and once outside, he would gaze at the fields, for no other reason than to see them! He went about the country to no purpose, and it pleased him to find that pollarded willows look like people, all with the same thing to gossip about; that big flights of pigeons, as they rise from the roofs, have the movement and the sound of a fan; with other such imaginings in the matter of the woods, and the leaves, and the little animals.

In that way, what was bound to happen came along in the form of a bad debt, which went on and on, and got bigger and complicated. Dates came round with bills to meet, which he could wipe out per contra; then suddenly—a last one, which could not be wiped out. On the advice of a lawyer, as persuasive as a priest, he had recourse to a little sale. Now, the parcel of land that Quinquin tore away was knocked down to Jacquinot.

What a victory! From across the Gueusine he had got right in among the enemy! It was really affecting to see, as you went by—the enclosure carefully surrounded by a very high fence, in the middle of Quinquin's clover. The latter's little homestead seemed to have been mutilated.

Following that event, Quinquin lowered his head in the street. Then spring came to comfort him, and people heard him one morning singing like an incorrigible bird.

Then it was that he met Léontine, Léontine whom

full daylight suited so well! She had hair as fair as the flame by which one keeps vigil; and her bright eyes were of richness incalculable. Quinquin was stupefied at first by the appearance of this passer-by, whom he used to look at and listen for equally when she came near and when she had gone away. Then the world became a beautiful palace, specially built around her. One evening she stood still for a little while, near to him, looking like a saint. Several evenings after he dared to murmur a prayer before her. Then a slight blush blossomed on her silky cheek, and the miracle happened that she listened to him.

Yet June had not ended when she disappeared. He waited for her, in distraction, till the day when he saw her face shining and blooming on the other side of the river, on the threshold of Jacquinot's house.

Jacquinot had taken his betrothed from him! The unlucky man tried to compete, to meet her again. But she avoided him; her father interposed and used brutal and humiliating language to him.

While he sought tremblingly to recover the savour of joy, or even only of peace, Jacquinot's luck increased, while his own still dwindled. His face wrinkled and acquired so mournful an air that the little girls began to be afraid. People turned away from him. In return for his looks, there only remained those of Rémi, whose attachment increased patiently every day. The man liked to put his arms round the donkey's neck, and when the animal took a step nearer him so that he could rub his head better on his chest, that was his only compensation here on earth.

Protracted, perishing rains in the autumn sufficed

to ruin him. All he possessed had to be sold, and as the chastisements of fate never come singly, he took cold, by the side of the empty fireplace, on the very day the matter was decided.

He went to bed shivering. After a heavy nightmare he opened his eyes. It was broad daylight, but there was no one near him. He thought of calling, but as no one could come he kept silent. Besides, helpless and choking, was he capable of shouting?

The deserted man rolled distressful eyes. And lo, the window, insecurely shut, opened, and a dark, unshapely silhouette appeared!

It was Rémi that had come, attracted merely by the presence of his master; Rémi, out of his reckoning, ignorant and artless, like the spirit of affection.

The man wanted to say, "*You* will not forsake me!" but he stammered some formless sounds, as one's throat does in dreams; and he fancied he was stretching out his arms to Rémi, and he thought from the bottom of his heart, with all his might, that this was his brother.

Rémi, who was sparing in effusiveness, wagged his honest face and withdrew.

Quinquin died that night or the following morning.

Jacquinot bought his house—a final apotheosis, rather spoiled, all the same, by the premature disappearance of the conquered.

It was quite a big job to get Rémi away. He seemed to have decided to stay planted there, and he stiffened himself obstinately on his feet. But they tugged him and beat him in such a way that he was obliged to trot where they wanted him to. By the road which

descends along the Gueusine, by the distant bridge of Garages, and by the other road which comes back up the right bank, he arrived at Jacquinot's house. On the same day they harnessed him to go to market at Clamarande.

Léontine was laughing with the fame of having a carriage; Jacquinot was feeling pride and joy trembling in the skin of his face.

Husband and wife wedged themselves in with difficulty among the vegetables and baskets. Rémi, being whipped, set off.

But behold! Instead of following the road, he turned sharply to the left and shot across the field towards Quinquin's house—you could see it facing you, but it was on the other side of the ravine!

There Rémi was returning, quite straight, quite plainly, in unconquerable hope. In the little carriage, swept away and jolting about, Jacquinot scolded and bellowed, Léontine uttered piercing cries. But Rémi cared neither for their shouts nor those of the peasants who came running with upraised arms, nor for the furiously shaken reins. With the perfect simplicity of one being who loves another, he was anxious to return to *their* house. There could not have been anything beyond that in the perfection of so paltry a heart.

Jacquinot straightened himself to jump, but Léontine fastened on to him in terror and held him tight.

The carriage reached the edge of the precipice. It happened that the ass, already falling, turned his head towards his new masters, and they had the time to see in his big eyes the shining angel of a soul.

THE MORT

ON the seat which leans against my house I was looking once more at my little domain before it went to sleep in the twilight, at my fore-court, spread out at my feet. On the right was my quickset hedge, and in the wall opposite me my gate, which is always open.

That gate looks on to the road that borders the forest, and it showed me a cloud of leafy branches gilded by the setting sun, gilded also by the autumn, like a sun still more huge.

The day was ending gently and—I thought—carefully. The refined light on my hedge brought out the tints in perfection, and applied itself to every flower and even to every leaf.

Harshly, a blowing of horns burst forth. Some turn-out of the old marchioness was going by in the forest.

And behold, a great silhouette of strange design appeared on the threshold of my gate, blocking up the whole opening. Then the huge mass leaped forward, recoiled, and wavered in the middle of the courtyard.

It was a stag, the one that the guests of the château had been pursuing for hours. He stood there a moment, and we looked at each other. I could dimly see that his coat was stained with mud and foam, his

big eyes troubled, and his heart beating his sides like a hammer.

He made another leap, and withdrew into the hollow of an angle, facing forward, but at the end of his strength, motionless, silent, ignorant. But frantic barks were surrounding the house. The hounds were piling themselves up around the gate and howling against the wall.

Behind them, breathless and excited children were running up in increasing numbers. Soon all the inhabitants of the village were about us. Triumphantly they pointed at the stag with the huge antlers, as if he had been a kind of savage king at last arrested in his career.

A hurried backing of the spectators now; horsemen and horsewomen turned the corner—a whirlwind of red coats and dust, a clatter and the cracking of whips, the flashing of bright metal.

All came to a disorderly stand, and the huntsmen drew up behind the discordant line of the dogs to sound the mort.

And alone, infinitely alone, the obscure life which had let itself be caught in the trap of my house did not stir. In resignation he waited for the peace of life or for the peace of death. I saw the excited movements of the crowd that was after his blood; and I saw *him* living, I felt that his flanks were heaving and his throat trembling—his throat, the object of that desperate holiday.

A red horseman had nimbly dismounted. With a slow movement he drew his hunting-knife from its sheath, and one could see the blade was damascened.

The dogs continued to give tongue; but everybody had stopped talking and moving about, and each one was watching, watching to the utmost. There were stifled cries, mingled with some hysterical laughter.

The man prepared to come into the courtyard. Questioning me with a movement of his head, he shouted—one had to shout to be heard above the uproar of the dogs—

"You allow us, I suppose, monsieur?"

But I put out my arm to bar the way, and shouted in my turn, "No, I will not allow you!"

He stopped dead, nonplussed.

"Eh? What, what? What did you say?" He turned towards the newcomers. "He will not let us go in!"

The announcement was received with a cry of amazement, into which the shrill note of feminine voices entered.

"The insolent fellow!" cried an old lady. She spoke to one of her companions: "Offer him money!" she said aloud.

"You will be paid for any damage, my good fellow!"

My eyebrows puckered, and he found nothing more to say.

Then they all began to speak at once, asking me questions, baffled and fevered, with a terrible anger lighting up their eyes.

Buttressed against my threshold like a post, I looked upon those besieging faces, those faces that a strange chance allowed me to see so nakedly near.

All of them bore the stamp of the same murderous

instinct, suddenly let loose by my opposition. It showed unmistakably on their features through all the words and excuses and arguments. If they were wanting to hurl themselves on me in rage and hatred, it was not only in wounded pride, but hideous disappointment.

They had run the flying beast to earth, and now that the run was over, they wanted to cut its throat. One of them tried to explain that to me, in broken phrases, and while he spoke he turned his head towards their prey, so as to inspect it.

An old man put out his hand, like clutching claws, towards the hoped-for victim. Another, more ferocious, gazed on it with longing.

And the women were uglier than the men. Shame kept their actual words back in their throats, but they were wholly in the throes of an extraordinary agitation. One knew they had surrendered to a disgraceful expectation, that all their bodies shook with it.

One of them, very young, with her plaited hair dancing half-loosened on her back, had slid into the front row in a sudden impulse, and lifting her charming eyes to me and clasping her hands, she said, "I beg of you, monsieur!"

In comparison with the passionately discomfited crowd, the baying of the hounds had assumed something of innocence. Dogs are slaves, and all they had against the stag was human hatred.

And the country folk were now more aloof. It seemed to me that they were separating themselves from the others, as though they began to understand that hunting was not what they thought.

A humble woman, with a child in her arms, went away hurriedly, as though she had suddenly feared contagion. The village butcher, in the blood-stained apron of his trade and with his arms majestically crossed, was watching, and one read on the sombre workman's face an expression of contempt and anger.

Yet the snarling and the menace were growing fiercer.

I knew that we should both be overcome, that I could not long defend the hunted beast, so great was their desire to assassinate it.

My eyes rested on the huge animal, which was not even wounded; and dreams of kindness passed through my head in hopeless hurry and disorder. The few minutes of life that I had saved for it till then seemed to me precious and almost affecting. Thinking of the bloodthirsty shouts which beset me, I thought how alike in their dying are the human being and the animal, which differ so prodigiously in life; and that all living beings pass away in fraternity.

So I clenched my fists, and stammered, "I will not allow it! Go away!"

But the crowd was overflowing, and ready for anything. "We must have him!" panted a voice. "The mort, the mort!" shouted the rest.

"I have it!" A little hand was waving: "We can kill it from here with my carbine!"

"True! True! A good idea!"

"Let me! Let me!"

A young man cocked the carbine and measured the distance with his eye. I seized the weapon by the barrel and tore it from his grasp.

"Clodhopper!" he sputtered.

Then it was that the pressure became everywhere irresistible, and the mad crowd poured in.

Lifted up, hustled, and forced back, I still tried to make myself heard: "Go away—I will not permit it!"

But their furious glee would listen no longer; they rushed towards the animal, which from the angle of the wall opened his eyes with the great empty peacefulness of nature—or of death.

And then I know that I hurled myself in front of the condemned creature; I know that I shouldered the carbine and fired on the pack of men and women—and I know that I did right!

REVENGE

IN the circus dressing-room, all among the poor tinselled finery—vainglorious posters and the rubbish of scenery—the little lady lion-tamer was laid out, cold and still. They had placed her on some wall-hangings and drapery, as if on flags; and I was keeping vigil alone, still wearing my lion-tamer's costume.

My grief was in vain. She was dead, my companion, my wife, my child, she who had devised for me so many good words and beautiful looks. All through the hours of my sobbing, while the gleam of the candle trembled on her, her little face was becoming more and more motionless.

This was her last night on earth. This one night more, although dead, she was there, by my side. This one night more, although dead, she smiled at me. Her restful features had regained their true form, their habits, and so, naturally, she had begun to smile at me. This one night more I might have touched her. But to-morrow she would be in the ground, and then, secret and solitary, she would change.

And all my mourning, all my impotence, were reiterated in a futile prayer, an insane invocation that I uttered tremblingly: "Oh, that this tragedy had not happened! Oh, that she had not gone into the cage! Oh, my God, that——"

And my thought went in a frightful shudder to the one that had killed her—him—the big lion.

In a corner of the cage—I do not know how, for the hideous thing was so swiftly over—a mysterious spasm of anger had thrown the huge monster on her, and she was killed instantly.

Yet now she was so smiling and so sweet! It was her smiles and sweetness that obsessed me most while I remained there, not daring to look anywhere but at her, so few were the moments left to us. The torturing memory of the purity of her voice came to me, the buoyancy of her walk, the smallness of her hands; and I writhed again.

The lion—the lion! It was towards midnight that I was seized by a desperate and convulsive rage against the big accursed lion. A fierce idea took root in my brain—to be revenged and slay him!

And I rose staggering, to go and kill him.

I went along a passage, around the slanting canvas of the circus, and I came to the cages with my lantern alight and my revolver.

I remember no more of the details. At the end, wholly against the bars, moved the monumental shape. Then, disturbed in the sovereignty of his slumber, the lion rose and extended himself, hostile and fierce; his claws tore the boards of the floor, and a hoarse snarl came from the hell of his throat.

Mad fury arose to my head. I put out my arm. Once, twice, six times I fired.

Hideous and huge the phantom rose to its full height, like a house blown up by a mine. He shook himself terribly. As in a hurricane, the cage and the

whole show—and, one would have said, the earth itself—trembled.

Then he breathed a little plaintive mew, and I knew it was a sound of inmost suffering. He sighed and sank, and I heard him licking his wounds.

His heart must have been hacked by the bullets. In an instant his blood filled the cage and dripped outside.

I was cold as ice, and stupefied; I could do nothing more.

But suddenly acute remorse, unlooked-for and harrowing, carried me away. I went into the cage and up to him, and I heard my lips asking his forgiveness. He ceased to lick himself, remained for a moment motionless; then he leaned gently against me, revealing the huge wound whence his blood flowed like a spring.

And we stayed thus, both of us, side by side, not understanding. The great body continued to spread its blood abroad and to utter a very faint rattle, veiled and choked, as if meant for me alone. Ah, that too little voice, that seemed to be speaking so quietly to me! The gigantic face, bristling and full of darkness, was declining slowly towards the ground, and I could see the green beacons of his eyes waning like lamps.

Stooping low, I looked at him closely, and a sort of wonder smote me to see such a big, strong, and beautiful work of creation.

I searched the emerald twilight of his gaze; I scanned the lines of his body, gathered, piled up, and sculptured under that heavy velvet; and all the won-

derful organism put together for a career of extraordinary adventures and victories. I put out my hand and touched the enormous head—helpless and obscure, perhaps, but a world all the same.

I saw him better and better, more and more. My gaze went down into him, as into a well. I looked on him as one might upon treasure. I worshipped his so innocent pride, his fire and his fierce love of life, the menacing plenitude of his slumber, the supple tension of the clusters of his flesh, the festival of his banquets, and his tawny acquaintance, born of the desert, with the mirage, the daylight, the oasis, the night, and the stars.

I stroked the paw he had placed too gently on the ground, and my fingers mingled with his half-extended claws. His claws! He had killed her—her, with *those* claws. He had stained exquisite flesh with those hideous, criminal claws.

Criminal? No—innocent! There was but one criminal—myself!

And as I almost lay on the body whose throbs came less frequently and grew immense, I clasped the dying giant in my arms, and trembled as I pressed him to me, while he surrendered his head upon my heart.

Then, like a sleeper awakened, like a blind man restored to sight, I saw Truth change her shape. I began to unravel things more terrible and more delightful than I had till then been capable of understanding—the incalculable value of life and action, of all that which my frail judgment's decision had cast into the mud, into corruption, into dust.

I had added this supineness to the other—to that of

the little angel laid down yonder like a crucifix. I had made death more pitiless and more infamous.

All was worse than it was before. The murder of the child and the murder of the lion had no resemblance, none. With a prodigious effort, I tried to reconcile these tragedies, to join them together, to change them for each other, not merely to add them to one another. I could not, *I could not!*

One must needs be mad to go after revenge. Why? Because a calamity cannot wipe out a calamity. Why? I do not know; but revenge is not a human thing.

And when he died, in spite of the immensity and desperation of my regret, I, in a poor fevered nightmare, could not help stammering to myself that he had gone to Paradise!

Since then I have wandered through many years. But, wretched as I have become, I have kept in me incomparable remorse. There is something profound that I know, that I have seen. I who have slain somebody—no, not somebody—yes, somebody!—I hold such a respect for life that I can no longer be misled whenever the issue is somewhat wide; and when, hiding in some field, motionless as a scarecrow, I see the shooters, or even children let loose among the butterflies, or even the anglers, who do not know so much about it as I, I pity the poor people.

Sometimes my belief turns me in another direction, and I would like to cry out upon revenge, and beseech you all to burst that bond that you would fain establish between one suffering and another.

This is a very heavy burden of mine—to have acquired the right to make such profound decisions. It

is not given to all, by one chance in their lives, to have regarded a living creature, if only an animal, so perfectly that they can see how little real difference there is between all those who can feel pain.

It is difficult to see the truth and to keep it within sight. Preparation is necessary for that, and also a coincidence of events. In the ordinary course of time all things become confused; error hangs brutally heavy, and we are so little that our little thoughts hide infinity from us.

THE NAME

IF two loose nerves in the neck of a dog are tightly bound together, then, by the discontinuity of the neuroplasma thus provoked, the dog must always die, always.

He had often tested it by experiment, but in his hurry to carry it out once more, he went through the streets with long hasty steps, wrapped in the long overcoat that looked like a priest's robe.

His studious face was poked forward. The light of the lamps seemed to have taken the colour out of it; arguments and reveries had fixed his features like writing and wiped out the youth of it.

A great thought had settled itself in his mind and haunted him for years: this theory of the nervous system, was it true or false? Who was right? Of those who defend it and those who deny it, who are the victors and who the vanquished?

That day, the desire to find one more proof of his conviction, under the scalpel that quivers in the flesh, the desire to know still a little more infallibly what he knew, was speeding his footsteps.

He arrived at the grey house, alone in the suburb's wandering territory, aloof from the others because of the experiments and the cries.

An old man opened the door to him. "Is everything ready, Gervais?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good; I will join you in the laboratory."

There they reappeared to each other, clad in long white blouses. It was a wide, low room with a tiled floor, and marble tables scattered about. One might say that it was the skeleton of a room, and its whiteness was soiled by the beginning of the evening.

One heard the dripping of a tap on the stone, and some stifled lamentations that came from the foot of the wall, where some holes were contrived, and closed with bars. In the depth of these holes some dark forms were moving, though they could be seen only by stooping.

The servant arranged some phials and instruments. The other man, with a label in his hand, was refreshing his memory of a formula with a last glance. Then he came to the central table, which was carefully washed and supported a little trestle-stand, a sort of diminutive bed, just big enough to take a child.

"Number 223!" the master commanded.

"Yes, sir." Hastening his step, which rheumatic old age was making dilatory, Gervais approached one of the niches, stooped over it, and opened the hatch.

Number 223 shot out of it so suddenly that he escaped the servant's outstretched hand, and set off at full gallop round the laboratory.

The assistant stifled an oath, and the master a growl.

Number 223 rushed and jumped, got round the obstacles, held fast to the slippery floor and turned the corners, all with incredible speed. He had big black feet and they seemed to grow more numerous, and to

be mixed together. He was long and high, quite black and quite thin, his belly hollow and his back like a saw. He uttered short barks of high spirits and defiance. Drunk with liberty, he was playing, with all his might, and he filled the mournful room with a festival of gaiety and joy.

Gervais, abashed at the scandal, tried in vain to catch the dog again, and the old man felt his clumsy and futile hands trembling. He dreaded the wrath that would certainly be gathering yonder under the long blouse so still and straight, and the pale head whose eyeglass was focussed on him.

Number 223 had come to a standstill three paces from the man, but on the first movement of a hand he was off like a shot to the other end of the room.

"Enough of that!" growled the angry master; "are you going to get him, after all; yes or no?"

Then he turned his back with an irritated shrug of his shoulders, and began nervously fumbling in his instrument case, so as to keep himself in countenance while waiting.

Gervais tried to approach the fugitive dog by degrees and by artifices; but No. 223, inured to this sort of exercise, dodged him every time, and clamorously.

When quite tired out, the assistant had an inspiration:

"Here, Médor! Médor, come here!" he cried.

Number 223 understood that he was spoken to, for he uttered a distinct bark and erected the sharp triangle of his head.

"Come, Médor!" said Gervais again. But he stopped dead, his mouth agape. The savant had struck

the marble table with his lean fist, and his trembling voice questioned him with astonishing violence, "Why are you giving him a name, you old fool, you old lunatic?"

Why was he? He spluttered in bewilderment, for he did not know. To begin with, that was not his real name, of course. Dogs were no longer given such names.

The master knitted his brows. "Old lunatic!" he growled.

But he had put his case down, and with empty hands and hanging arms he watched the excited dog run round, as he brought all his artless resources into play to escape the executioners for a moment. The master lingered over watching him live, surprised at the importance he had assumed since a poor name had by chance been cast at him.

He had become something else, all at once, as though it had been a miracle.

Till then he had been Number 223, an obscure organism, only existing for experiments, his only fate to yield the blood, the pain, and the problem of his flesh to those who wanted them. Till then he was jumbled with the two hundred and twenty-two whose agony they had utilised to give life to formulas, to sustain theories, and had then cast out the remains.

Now he was personified; he had become an identity. One was forced to see that *he* lived, quite as much as the other living things. The name had pointed him out, with all that he stood for—his power of thinking hazily, of desiring so many things and of being un-

happy, and the humble treasure of his memories, too, his friends and his past, divinely secret.

He had not changed, yet suddenly he had been recognised. No sort of argument could wipe out that revelation.

After a little awkward silence, the lawmaker asked, "Where does he come from?"

Gervais raised his arms—no one knew! Not from the town, in any case. From the country, no doubt; perhaps from the suburbs. He was a sort of sheep-dog, with hair like a goat. Yes, certainly they lived in a village, they whom he had lost.

However, believing that he was forgotten, the condemned dog drew near. He came and sniffed at their hands with infinite innocence, and as he lifted his eyes towards theirs, they sparkled in his coaly face.

He uttered a tiny lament, and it was as though they had spoken. Then he said nothing, meekly. He remained standing there, steady as a statue. One could only see the vibration of his breath, and the beating of his heart.

Gervais dared not touch him; he awaited the master's orders, who kept silence. Then Gervais timidly risked saying, "There are people looking for him."

And the old man looked at the young scientist with slight entreaty.

The theorist seemed to come out of a dream, and said very quickly, in a clear and unaccustomed voice: "I am no longer able to do anything with him. Take him away. I don't want him any more. Not *him!*"

"Yes, sir, not him!" said Gervais, and his eye was bright and his heart had become all glorified.

They stood there several seconds longer, in the deepening twilight. Darkness effaces details, and helps us to come nearer each other. Among the shadows one notices profundities that daylight disguises; and one thinks, in a creative brotherliness akin to genius, of the things one does not know, and the rights one has not. And during that brief and fleeting moment there was no difference between the abashed scientist who had forgotten his science, the humble workman who let his heart speak for itself, and the other, who in comparison with them was hardly more than a stranger.

And the old servant dared to murmur aloud, sympathetically, "My dear sir!"

THE ONE GROWN OLD

AT Compiègne, the post-chaise goes back. This is the last stage. In the bus, now, I am shaken up, and my brown curls are dancing round my oval face. While I look mechanically through the window at the driver's leather coat, tossing about like a sailor on the waves, and at the road which hurries from the front to the rear past its border of bushes, I am dreaming.

Wrapped up in this tasselled shawl of violet silk, I certainly look old enough for a married woman. As a matter of fact, I am twenty-three. It is six years now since I went away from this country where I am going back at full speed; six years since I left those who brought me up—my uncle Bertin and my aunt, and my cousins Delphine and Dorothée, and my cousin Florestan—to go into the Convent of White Ladies at Amiens.

I am returning, rich in experience, still thrilling with the wise whisperings of the Mother Superior and the sisters, and the serious and infrequent murmur of Monseigneur.

But my convent memories are growing faint. This is the last day of October. The red rays of the declining sun glide over the ground like interminable passers-by; the sound of the angelus-bell mingles with those on our horses.

So I am looking again on that evening at the end of October, 1840, six years ago, when I went away along the trailing shafts of sunset, amidst the interwoven ringing of big bells and little ones.

That evening, after the tears and excitement of farewell, my family—by adoption—had grouped themselves on the moss-velvet of the old garden steps, close to the grotto with the ornamental weeping willow at the entry, so as to watch me going away on my godfather's arm, the admiral. My cousins Delphine and Dorothée, one eight years old and nursing her doll, the other twelve and swinging her work-bag, showed me in the sunset their faces golden as their hair, and their mouths shining like cherries. Florestan was shaking on his long legs, and my uncle was nodding his fine lawyer-like head, a head like that of the King of the French, and my aunt was standing as straight and as pale as our statue of Pomona that was dressed in ivy up to the chin.

And Fido, the black dog. He understood that I was going away, and objected to it! He ran from the others to me and from me to the others, speedy, patient, and obstinate. He tried to multiply himself, and so make a chain between us! But he could not prevent the separation.

All has changed. Because all things change. They told me again and again, at Amiens. The good ladies there prepared me for it, in affectionate and confidential tones. One grows up quickly and grows old very quickly. Six years are quite a remarkable space of time. Besides, Messieurs de Chateaubriand and de Lamartine, whom we secretly adored, disclose in

a hundred tuneful ways the transformations that years bring.

All things change, all things grow old. I have changed. How I must have grown old! I am sighing, between the jolts of the diligence, whilst my arrival draws near and oppresses me.

We stop—Villevert, already! I have arrived and climb down. We are early and there is no one to meet me. I will go on alone into Senlis. The way, of course, is by the bridge over the Nonette.

But I am not all abroad! On the contrary, I can see everything familiarly and easily. The Senneliers' meadow is coming into view, and seems to be speaking gloriously to me. The shadows of the trees in the avenue fall on me in a way I know well. I could almost believe that those trunks come forward, one by one, and go with me a little way, without looking like it. And at the bend—there is the house!

The red gate—I recognise it so completely and so sweetly that really we are recognising each other!

I push the gate, and in spite of its venerable hinges, it opens without saying anything. I am dazzled with trembling surprise—there they are! All my relations, just there, gathered in the sunset on the steps all velvety with moss. It is a chance that they are there, since they are not expecting me yet. But it is so much the same group as six years ago! Just as then, the faces of Delphine, nursing a bunch of flowers instead of a doll, and of Dorothée, who holds a book instead of embroidery, are reflecting the evening light. Florestan, his hands as timidly empty as when he was nineteen years old, is oscillating in the same way on those

long legs. Close by the grotto and the willow, my uncle still looks like a statue of Louis-Philippe, and my aunt a statue of a woman.

Well! Six years have gone by! And yet it seems to me, in the flash of my first glance, as if I had just said good-bye to them before catching the diligence for Amiens. Yes, no doubt I have forgotten something or other and am coming back, and no doubt my godfather the admiral is waiting for me just outside the gate, with his two hands crossed on the silver knob of his stick, his chin nodding on his gaudy waistcoat—a waistcoat like West Indian birds.

"Noemie! Noemie!"

They have seen me and are hurrying towards me, my uncle and aunt gently, my three cousins very quickly. They seize me, and clap their hands, and laugh. We shout, and all of us try to talk at once. Affectionate tears are shining in the eyes of Delphine and Dorothée, and I can feel them in mine, too.

We are the same! Although Delphine's face is a little longer, and Dorothée's skirt a little less short, over those white stockings with the black ribbons of her satin buskins wound round them, they are the same. The loving smile of the parents and the awkward smile of Florestan are identical with those I took away with me once upon a time. All have steadily remained true to the pictures kept in my memory. And the grotto, and the willow, and Pomona in her ivy costume have remained so, as if they were people. As for me, I am exactly the Noemie of before. The more I open my eyes, the more I recognise myself everywhere.

We are strolling in the last lustre of the evening.

No, we do not change! No, we do not grow old!

What was all that they told me yonder—about the mysterious menaces of time and human changes? The good ladies were very wrong to put me so dreadfully on my guard against the passing of time. Growing old? It is a sort of terrible legend made up by nuns who have no acquaintance with life, and by poets who sing, shut up in their poetry like noble foreigners.

As we turn out of the walk that is enclosed between box hedges, trimmed and high, I say suddenly, "Ah! What's that?"

A shape is trailing itself along the gleaming border and coming towards us, lifting a sort of face from time to time. It is a tottering dog, quite grey, with tufts of woolly hair, and scars on its back.

"It's Fido," says Dorothée.

I shake my head hard: "No, it's not Fido!"

"Yes, it is Fido," my cousin replies; "but he's old."

The dog stops, a few steps in front of us, and stares at me painfully, with eyes that are dull, and their lids deformed and blood-shot.

"He was five years old when you went away," Delphine explains. "He's eleven now, and dogs only live twelve."

Then I stop dead, and begin to tremble a little, and bend over this living but worn-out and almost done-for creature.

Yes, it is indeed Fido, he whom I had often played with as if he had been a jolly toy, black and brotherly, when his eyes were bright, his coat new, and his happiness full-blown. I find some traces of him again

through the misery that clothes him, and at the bottom of the poor grimace that disfigures him.

"Are you old, Fido? Are you old?"

He seems to move his dusty old head, and in that way to say "yes," without understanding any more than I. I stoop, very gently, to get nearer to him, and on a level with him. I look at him face to face, and then I see old age!

Because of the difference in length of time between the lot of a dog and that of *other people,* he reveals what we shall all be one of these days—grown ugly, sullied and collapsed, with hollow eyes that weep and worse than weep, with the infirmity of a heart that has hardly strength or good-nature enough left to go on beating. Yes, condemned sooner than we are, he bestows that forecast on the transient young people that we are as yet. He proves that they are right, the beautiful books and the serious friends who warn us of the tragic changes of life.

Cured in a moment of my youthful foolishness, I stand convinced in face of this prophet, so simple, so majestic.

THE MOTHER

ON the day after the funeral she went back to the hospital to get little Adelin's clothes. At dusk she pushed open the right hand gate, where the notice-board is, and went along the drive that the hearse had taken, in the opposite direction, bearing a white coffin, as little as a doll's cardboard box.

She went into the familiar entrance-hall. Madame Isabelle, in a white apron, was going through, and smiled at her awkwardly as she passed. She gave the nurse a greeting that was short and restrained, so that she would not cry. The effort made her almost stumble at the entry into the corridor. She passed along it and sat down in the waiting-room, rising when her turn came. At last she received her parcel through a little window. The man who handed it out dared not raise his eyes to hers, and she did not think of looking at him. Henceforth there was nothing in the world for her but these few garments. It was very little to possess, a paper parcel as big as a hand, and separately the baby's light blue frock, washed and ironed. She fled.

She had hardly reached the threshold of the principal building when she must stop, unfold the dress, and look at it.

Hanging at the end of her fingers, it was extraordinarily bright, for in the evening blue is more white

than white itself. The woman was dazzled by the apparition of the garment, the only living thing left of the child who was now an orphan in Paradise. She felt a frightful sob mounting from her heart.

There were people in the drive that led out to the road. To avoid them, in that moment of keen distress, she turned aside and escaped in the direction of the garden, along the big brick building, past the wings and various outbuildings. The open air calmed her at last and prevented the new convulsion of sorrow.

She stopped walking. Where was she? In what section of the infirmary, that was big as a cemetery? She could not make it out, decided to return the same way, traversed many paved paths between grated windows, and passing through a little yard, reached a building isolated as an island.

"What's that?"

At the foot of the wall in front of her some strange recumbent shapes were collected. She drew near;—dead bodies.

They were the remains of animals sacrificed in the vivisection room. They cast out in that corner every day the lowly remains that had served their purpose, ransacked and emptied, smashed and mutilated, according to the varying nature of lesson or research, each one mournfully travestied by the particular need of each experiment.

She shuddered and made a quick step aside to take flight anew, then faltered towards the railing.

But there, in the very corner of the charnel-house, stranded apart from the deathly heap, she saw a tiny corpse, rigid and frightfully bloody.

It was a kitten, not more than a few weeks old. It lay on its back, and seemed drawn out and emaciated. Its back legs were straight as two drumsticks, close together upon the prolongation of the body; the fore-paws were folded upon a fragment of the chest. The head, dappled with wounds, of which one was the half-open jaws, was no bigger than a baby's fist.

The woman stopped dead. She had felt her heart gashed, and her hand went up to the wound. She went forward, bent lower, and looked closer.

One could make out the spiral marks of the bonds that had spread the slender organism upon the martyr's table. The mouth, dislocated, revealed fine teeth in pin-point rows; and the opened belly yawned also, black and shiny, letting the light in upon entrails as fine as skeins of thread.

She looked upon the abject creature, murdered with such tenacity and care, and shook from head to foot. Her eyes were drowned, she was stupefied by too many unformed thoughts.

She was familiar with the affairs of the hospital, for she had haunted it since the day when her precious little Adelin had been carefully carried in on tip-toe, hidden in a blanket. She had heard this one and that one talking. She knew that even if the surgeons had seized that brand-new, silky kitten in its full-blown frolics and its toy-like fragility, and even if they had torn it to pieces, it was for the best. The torture which destroyed the animal had no doubt served to substantiate medical science, to discover remedies and cures—for there were, it seemed, people whose good luck it was to have diseases that they cured!—but in

spite of this knowledge, she shook her head, trembled more and more, leaned against the railing and began to sob, quite overcome.

When she had cried, when she had suffered yet a little more pain than before, she leaned again over the little cold body, anxious to know why she was so sorry they had killed it.

She felt sure it was because of its littleness.

Against the bricks of the wall the tiny corpse lay full length, in imitation of sleeping people; it even recalled the frightfully good and quiet look of dead babies. Seeing its paws almost crossed on its vanished chest, with their claws like ends of thread, any woman would have thought, "What little arms!"

Ah, in spite of the reasons that the wise men would give if they were asked for them (as God would give His if one might at last question Him upon unhappiness), how could they mangle, pierce, and shatter so small a thing? Clad in their white blouses, they had attacked the little animal overturned and contracted on the table, its only chance of salvation the facility with which it could yield up its breath! And they had found some one extraordinary enough to give it the first stab! At a time when cradles are furiously set upon by monstrous diseases several surgeons were found to torture this kitten to the end, this abject life, this being so helpless that it could not even cry loudly!

Yes, the condemned was really too little,—that was why a half-healed heart was opening again before it; and above all, it was too new-born. Hardly had it begun, when the torture came, to know how to gambol and become familiar with life, frisking and purring in

celebration. There had been in it the innocence and the ignorance of an angel—of a little angel.

Abruptly she cried out and shook her head, awakened from a dream. All the same—an animal and a child—what a difference there is!

But as the evening clouded all things with its ineffaceable shade, weakening the lines which distinguish one shape from another, stripping off the ornamentation of mankind, she paid less attention to that difference. She ignored it, in spite of herself, in the gloomy reverie that held her there, opening her eyes wide, trying to spell things out, so many things.

Very slowly she understood. Falling night was darkening more and more the mourning mother, who could not afford black during the day. She could no longer take her eyes off the sorrowful remains laid so close to her, but in death and eternity, nevertheless.

"Ah," she murmured, "it's dead!"

She said that "Ah, it's dead!" as if it were a revelation; and such it was in fact.

Cast on the charnel-heap, the animal was hardly more than an endless, formless stain. The pretty rhythmic creature was no more, nor the delicate details it had been so rich in. There was nothing but a consummate, tragic apparition, as blood-black and shapeless as one's own heart.

And the revelation was exactly that. That motionlessness was far more significant than its gracefulness had been, which men profaned. The silence that stole from the inexhaustible spring of its mouth was of far greater moment than the weakling appeals it had scattered during its life. So far removed from us as it

was but lately, so silly, so little human, now it was just as superhuman as any other dead thing. Is it not true that while there are thousands and thousands of lives, trifling and distinctive, complex and diverse, there is only one death for all?

That is why little creatures are alike, in proportion as they suffer pain, in proportion as they set up their little divine resistance to torturers or to wrong; and especially in proportion as they die; so much so that all little dead things become relations.

And so, therefore, when one is a mother in deep mourning, as this one was, one is liable to descry, here and there, as it were, unknown children, strange and pitiful; little bodies, of a kind, that one adopts.

The proof of it was that she recognised this one a little bit, and that, before she left it, she tremblingly took the blue frock—the thing which was all in all to her on earth—and placed it on the frail corpse; and the dress covered it exactly, as if it had been made on purpose.

THE GREAT MEMORY

HE used to wander, quite little and quite naked, along the Cingalese shore, a shore perfumed by the ocean and by the forest, where the trees and the climbing roses select each other two by two and form couples. The black and shapeless rocks, the grey stones sculptured in the form of gods, stood there upright on the golden sand, between the sea, the forest, and the edge of the cemetery, whence profound silence overflowed.

His tiny bronze feet stirred like little tortoises in the mottled water that the last wave fringed. The sun laughed on his face and his neck, on his top-knot like carved ebony, on his belly that bulged like a bronze face.

As he grew up, he was dressed in white, and old Mali, a venerable mummy whose innocent and feeble breath still roamed within him, taught him the secrets of the beginning and the end, taught him everything, but notably the way and the tone in which one should chant the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

When he was twelve years old his father began to beat him. His mother, gentle as evening, collapsed in a corner of a mud hut that summers had turned into stone, respectfully suffered the man to strike the child.

Thus was he unhappy, even though he was spelling out the causes of creation and the linking of human

lots, in spite of the deep, submerging forest, in spite of the odorous green waves, like bushes that tumble down, weakly, humanly.

And when the old sage who had taught him was snuffed out on the surface of the world and sprinkled in the earth, the neophyte's mind, half-opened to the truth, laboured alone. He was surprised one day to see three young girls go by, brown and rounded, one of whom was much more surprising than the others, and could only be compared to the Virgin Viradja, who fascinated Krishna. As soon as they had gone by, he began again more than ever to be forlorn and to enchant himself with dreams. He wanted the things he did not know of. The allurement of new things so engrossed him that one morning, when some elevated English sailors were going along the shore, performing some sacred dance and singing violent hymns, he ventured to approach one of these cow-eaters, and stammer to him in English that he wanted to go away with them.

The questioned sailor laughed. Another, a chief, laughed with a superior laugh. Then this chief tapped his forehead and steered incontinently for the mud hut, where the father was thinking about nothing, silent as a tree-trunk, while in a corner abode a dark and sighing mass of femininity. Soon, then, along with the English ship on which he was engaged as cook's boy, and in his nice Hindu dress, the youth left Ceylon.

In proportion as the coast faded away and became as vague as the ocean horizon, in proportion as the past changed itself into a future, one could see the rapture in the black pupils of his white eyes and in

his brown face, although he hardly knew what these men to whom he had offered his life would do with him after all.

Yet these sailors, who drank a sort of boiling water quite opposite to water, and who ate masses of red meat resembling their faces, used him harshly, and even seemed to find diversion in his distress, as in a game. He took fright and hid in corners, where they used to go seeking him with shouts. Instinctively he sought the aid of a yellow Maltese and a glistening negro who were on the ship. But no one had pity on him. Worse still, in the Mediterranean the sun became cloudy, and it threw a gloom over him, still deeper. But there were belated sunset gleams of his hopes, as they called at one port after another. At Palermo everything recalled to him the shores he had left. But at Gibraltar there was nothing at all except a frightful quarrel between sailors.

He arrived in London in the end, as one runs aground. The sailor who had presided over his departure from the island of his birth conducted him to a bar in the City, on whose front window a painted Buddha was beaming.

There he lived, as nipper and as ornament, to attract people and to occupy himself with little menial tasks which one does with all one's might, and with bowed head.

They assigned a room to him in another locality, at the top of a vast building furrowed with staircases, with corridors and corners, where lighted gas-jets showed up like poor ghosts.

He obeyed from morning till night, and then went

to his room to sleep. He hardly knew any more who he was. Going and returning, he felt himself spurned and almost trampled underfoot by the black multitudes in the streets. Above all was he confused by the fog, in which he felt himself imprisoned. He put out his hands, and collided gently with this mud in space, which mixed morning and evening, and enclosed the streets with a ceiling.

In the bar devilish faces followed each other, that glowed like furnaces and smoked furious pipes; and groups of men and women as well, whose jests were incomprehensible, and their laughter and their purposes impenetrable. Yet one rose-cheeked and queenly lady appeared suddenly to him, like a true Hindu flower in European disguise, and the vision of the foreigner lent him for a moment a reflection of the splendour he had known in the land from which he had fled.

She came two days following, but never again. When she did not return on the third day, he sighed and shivered. He went home in the rain that night. In the rolling life of the streets he looked more than ever like a little white sail, venturing upon the high seas. When he had climbed to his room, he opened the skimpy window and looked out.

In spite of the monstrous fog, the street lamps could be seen to left and right, like chains of stars trailing on the ground. He was cold. Then he went hot, so hot that he touched the iron bar of the sill with relief.

Then he saw his past again, through the dense, damp night. He saw again the dark gulf of the forest, the waves so hurried and so human, the jays and the green

parrots and the grey crows, and the clear sky where one's emancipated gaze takes wings infinite as a bird's, or rather as the soul of a bird. He heaved a sigh of consecrated sorrow. What sacrilege to have left the riches of the past for the poor present! And yet—he was obliged to remember it—the last months that he had spent wandering yonder between the black rocks and the grey gods, his heart had been heavy, and his father had hurt him.

He saw the past again, and farther,—his childhood. He saw his little bronze feet again, living in the dappled water that embroiders the Indian Ocean. But at that time he had sorrows that his mother never found out, troubles deaf and dumb.

He saw farther still; an extraordinary day in that time when he was hardly sundered from the mother who was nursing him. He was wailing prayers to her, which sometimes by a miracle she understood. But that unceasing petition, although so frail and so disjointed, was also anxiety and distress.

He leaned lower in the cavity of the window, and saw farther yet—before his tiny infancy, before his birth. He saw again the times described to him by old Mali, so infallibly informed.

Farther and farther yet he looked into the bosom of the eternal past. There is light and warmth, and a background takes shape. The fields and trees respond to a passing breeze. There, a long-haired banyan is trembling; here, a palm more tardily undulates. Every leaf is sun-adorned. The old temple on the hill looks new; the statues and pillars, ever since separated like reefs, are regular and white.

And himself? He is there. Yes, he recognises himself there. He is moving forward with incredible gentleness and repose. In his soul there reigns a serenity which blends him with earth's profundity; in his action, a patience which mingles him with time; in his eye, a clearness which opens it wide and unites him with space.

Every care and every difficulty, every consuming desire and subtle deception, are at last uprooted from him. He even feels himself restricted and immured within a simple shape that holds and bows him, that only lets him look on the ground and a little way in front, and only see the sky as a silken scarf on the horizon.

The doctrine of reincarnation explains all. If he seems superhuman to himself in that prodigiously distant vision, it is because he is not yet a human being; he is an animal.

He is a tranquil animal, lulled and contemplative. He is walking. He goes up to the pool that is waiting for him, hardly wrinkled and almost fraternally peaceful. He leans over the water, and finds that his face is the sacred face of an ox.

Those wide eyes are his, but more chaste and more purely void. He bears an assurance more nakedly open and liker to natural law than the troubled creature he will become, and that man will continue to become until the day when Kalki shall destroy everything, as the Supreme Soul of the Universe has promised.

And thus the derelict lad with the fevered hands appears face to face with himself, as a great sage ap-

pears to a man. He recalls that he was formerly the serious companion, pellucid and dignified, of the elements. He did not even care, then, that he was already more profound and more mad than the grey stone carven in godlike form, which in its turn is less worthy than the black rock, divinely shapeless.

THE MISTAKE

WHEN I was quite young it was that I was overtaken by that strange variety of sensitiveness which was to lead me into crime.

I was a dreamy schoolboy, with a little pale face. The natural surroundings of my tender years delighted me—the sky, the fields, and evening, which dawns in the garden; but much better still I liked quivering things. I had the emotion of life, and that was my chief concern. I shared the sadness and the ill-luck of the beggars who stood at the edge of the road, or, worse still, of the street. It was too easy for me to feel compassion for others. When stories of poor people were related in my presence—justly or unjustly struck down by fate—I was seized with fits of crying; and then in the night, before going to sleep, in my momentous solitude, I whispered the stories over again, so that I could cry better about them.

But lo, I began, little by little and in spite of myself, to be more affected by the suffering of animals than by that of men!

I remember the evening when that infirmity of my heart began. We were sitting around the family table, in the sunshine of the lamp. Engravings were piled on the cloth, mournful and affecting scenes in the lives of the lowly, and we were looking at them in our turns, both the little ones and the grown-ups.

Every picture made me shiver a little, but suddenly there was one which lacerated me. It represented a poor man's funeral; the only follower was a dog, walking, and I almost groaned. One wondered what would happen when once the coffin was hidden by the grave, when once the dog *knew*. One wondered who would look after him, he who alone followed the dead.

But it was not that anxiety only that pressed upon me while I looked at the curly black dog following with solemn step the carriage that enclosed his master. It was the revelation of all the unhappiness there is. Never had I understood, as that scene made me understand, the momentousness of separation, the immense tragedy of mourning, the frightful punishment to which those who live together are liable. And I could not help thinking that if the artist had shown a man or a woman, or even a child or a greybeard, behind that coffin en route for eternity, the scene would not have called up in me the same world of distress and imaginings. I tried to recover myself; I blamed myself for that misleading compassion. But I forbade and alarmed myself in vain; I was obliged to submit to it.

I grew up and went to work. My sensitiveness was still as frail and juvenile, but it continued to select of all sorrows the lowliest, that it might throb in sympathy.

No doubt I was affected by the news of wars and the details of disaster; but there were other happenings which marked eras at that time in my youthful heart.

There were, for instance, the great stags that cow-

boys lassoed in the prairie, to saw off their antlers and draw all their teeth, which might be doomed to decorate the meeting-place of some society. An illustrated paper had given a picture of one of these animals, its forehead lopped and its toothless jaws shattered by the hasty surgery. Again allowed to stand (for in supreme mockery they restored their liberty to the martyrs who could no longer eat), it was looking with deep and infinite stupefaction upon him who had the courage to photograph it.

There were the dogs of Constantinople, which they heaped by hundreds into boats, and then took them in big tongs to drop them in the sea, in sight of a rock where they went to die and rot. One time it was a wandering dog that children crucified in a quarry and stoned to death. Another time it was a pregnant bitch which some urchins tortured, to amuse themselves by causing the confinement. There were the lambs on their way to the slaughter-house, who have both legs on one side broken, so that they will not gambol away, and who prop themselves against the flock; and many other tragedies of the streets, the laboratories, and elsewhere. There was the national protest, piercing and frenzied, of the bull-ring's spectators, against the cuirass for protecting the bellies of the poor old horses of the picadors, which would detract from the elegance of those sacred encounters; and so many other demands and yearnings of the sort.

Yes; in spite of the dreadful headlines of robberies, murders, fire, and shipwreck, it was *those* different deeds which in my eyes sullied my time above all else.

Certainly I was under no illusion concerning the

real but restricted intelligence of animals. I knew what they are, and what a man is, and the abyss which divides us. Then why—why?

I did not succeed in understanding it. Once or twice only—once, especially, when I was stared at by an old shepherd and his old dog at the same time, and the gaze of the latter seemed to me more beautiful in the heart of it—once or twice only could I surmise that here was a sort of miracle of simplicity, just as unintelligible as the divine miracles, and just as divine.

And then happened the tragedy that I have to confess. I was then a soldier in an expeditionary column in the depths of Southern Algeria. I had been put on sentinel duty at the edge of a wood, near our camp. I had orders to stop any one from passing, at all costs.

In the tepid grey of the dawn, a slight noise roused me, and I saw in front of me an enemy horseman, who had stopped twenty-five yards away.

Standing on his wide stirrups, with one hand over his grimacing and fiercely attentive face, the tall barbarian warrior scrutinised the road with no suspicion of my presence. His white horse, rearing on his slender, trembling legs, looked at me with the eyes of a gazelle.

Suddenly they darted for the road I was guarding. I levelled my rifle—to obey my orders. I took aim at the horse. But something stronger than I, stronger than everything, made me raise the weapon and aim higher. The shot rang out; the horse galloped on, but the man fell.

What matter the subsequent details? It remains to me to say this: I know that I committed a crime,

for I might have spared the life of one of my fellows without breaking my orders.

I know, I know all the reproaches I deserve, and what may be said of me. I said it to myself aloud the moment I saw that Arab reel, waving his arms as though he would try to hold fast to space.

Then why—why?

Desperately as before, but with more hurry and vigour, I seek to explain myself to my own eyes, to know myself farther and better.

I am succeeding badly. Yet there is a little guiding gleam. I believe that the reason of this inclination of mine, always to find the lowliest sorrows more infectious than the others, is the very innocence of those lower creatures that I have loved to the point of crime, their extraordinary innocence.

My brain and my heart, like yours, like those of all of us, are not yet capable of understanding men precisely. Men are too complicated.

Too many things befog and benumb the first glance one throws on them; they are self-concealing, too, more than self-confessing. But animals let themselves be seen face to face. I myself can already spell out the few infinite things they hold. Once in your presence, they reveal nakedly the miracle of living, and that of suffering. If the look in their eyes is affecting, it is because they are wide open, and one discovers in them sooner than anywhere else the deep truths that are common to us. It is easily understandable, then, that our pity, still an infant, sometimes goes urgently out to them before considering the

others; for pity, the greatest of human feelings, is made up of understanding and of light!

A day will come when our hearts will understand rich ones as well as poor ones. I bless that future which will be better than the present. But may my mistake, atoned for by so much remorse, be forgiven me. It was not the reverse of truth, but only the beginning of it.

THE END

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS

WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH DAY AND TO $1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY OVERDUE.

OCT 4 1935

FEB 15 1937

APR 5 1939

1Feb'57HJ

REC'D LD

FEB 5 1957

8Aug'57KL

REC'D LD

AUG 8 1957

17Apr'58Bh

REC'D LD

JUN 11 1958

29Nov'60JH

REC'D LD

NOV 15 1960

24Feb'61LE

REC'D LD

JUN 6 1961

REC'D LD

8Feb'62LE

JUN 15'64-8 AM

LD 21-100m-7,'33

GENERAL LIBRARY - U.C. BERKELEY

B000362760

387684

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY